This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

HW 2S2C S

Digitized by Google

KE400082(15)

THE ESTATE OF

EZYA H. BAKER

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

This Edition is limited to
one thousand and twenty-five copies
all numbered

No. 292

Digitized by Google

THE WORKS OF

GEORGE MEREDITH

THE EGOIST

I

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE WORKS OF
GEORGE MEREDITH

VOLUME XV

WESTMINSTER
ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE AND CO.
2 WHITEHALL GARDENS
1897

Digitized by Google

KE 400 82 (15)

Copyright in the
United States of America by
George Meredith, 1897

Digitized by Google

THE EGOIST

A COMEDY

IN NARRATIVE

VOLUME

I

Digitized by Google

Originally published
3 vols.: London 1879

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

	Page
Prelude. A Chapter of which the last Page only is of any Importance, . .	1
I. A Minor Incident, showing an Hereditary Aptitude in the use of the Knife, .	7
II. The Young Sir Willoughby, . .	12
III. Constantia Durham, . . .	19
IV. Lætitia Dale, ...	30
V. Clara Middleton, ...	48
VI. His Courtship, ...	59
VII. The Betrothed, ...	72
VIII. A Run with the Truant: a Walk with the Master, ...	89

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

	Page
IX. Clara and Lætitia meet: they are compared, ...	100
X. In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself, . . .	115
XI. The Double-Blossom Wild Cherry-Tree, .	136
XII. Miss Middleton and Mr. Vernon Whitford, ...	152
XIII. The First Effort after Freedom, . .	160
XIV. Sir Willoughby and Lætitia, . .	175
XV. The Petition for a Release, . .	188
XVI. Clara and Lætitia, . . .	203
XVII. The Porcelain Vase, . . .	215
XVIII. Colonel de Craye, ...	224
XIX. Colonel de Craye and Clara Middleton, ...	235
XX. An Aged and a Great Wine, . .	251
XXI. Clara's Meditations, . . .	265
XXII. The Ride, ...	281

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

	Page
XXIII. Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy, ...	298
XXIV. Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby, ...	314
XXV. The Flight in Wild Weather, . .	331

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE EGOIST

PRELUDE

A Chapter of which the Last Page only is of any Importance

Comedy is a game played to throw reflections upon social life, and it deals with human nature in the drawing-room of civilized men and women, where we have no dust of the struggling outer world, no mire, no violent crashes, to make the correctness of the representation convincing. Credulity is not wooed through the impressionable senses; nor have we recourse to the small circular glow of the watchmaker's eye to raise in bright relief minutest grains of evidence for the routing of incredulity. The Comic Spirit conceives a definite situation for a number of characters, and rejects all accessories in the exclusive pursuit of them and their speech. For, being a spirit, he hunts the spirit in men; vision and ardour constitute his merit: he has not a thought of persuading you to believe in him. Follow and you will see. But there is a question of the value of a run at his heels.

Now the world is possessed of a certain big book, the biggest book on earth; that might indeed be called the Book of Earth; whose title is the Book of Egoism, and it is a book full of the world's wisdom.

Digitized by Google

PRELUDE
A Chapter of which the Last Page only is of any Importance

So full of it, and of such dimensions is this book, in which the generations have written ever since they took to writing, that to be profitable to us the Book needs a powerful compression.

Who, says the notable humourist, in allusion to this Book, who can studiously travel through sheets of leaves now capable of a stretch from the Lizard to the last few poor pulmonary snips and shreds of leagues dancing on their toes for cold, explorers tell us, and catching breath by good luck, like dogs at bones about a table, on the edge of the Pole? Inordinate unvaried length, sheer longinquity, staggers the heart, ages the very heart of us at a view. And how if we manage finally to print one of our pages on the crow-scalp of that solitary majestic outsider? We may with effort get even him into the Book; yet the knowledge we want will not be more present with us than it was when the chapters hung their end over the cliff you ken of at Dover, where sits our great lord and master contemplating the seas without upon the reflex of that within!

In other words, as I venture to translate him (humourists are difficult: it is a piece of their humour to puzzle our wits), the inward mirror, the embracing and condensing spirit, is required to give us those interminable milepost piles of matter (extending well-nigh to the very Pole) in essence, in chosen samples, digestibly. I conceive him to indicate that the realistic method of a conscientious transcription of all the visible, and a repetition of all the audible, is mainly accountable for our present branfulness, and for that prolongation of the vasty and the noisy, out of which, as from an undrained fen, steams the malady of same-

Digitized by Google

ness, our modern malady. We have the malady, whatever may be the cure or the cause. We drove in a body to Science the other day for an antidote; which was as if tired pedestrians should mount the engine-box of headlong trains; and Science introduced us to our o'er-hoary ancestry—them in the Oriental posture: whereupon we set up a primæval chattering to rival the Amazon forest nigh nightfall, cured, we fancied. And before daybreak our disease was hanging on to us again, with the extension of a tail. We had it fore and aft. We were the same, and animals into the bargain. That is all we got from Science.

PRELUDE
A Chapter of which the Last Page only is of any Importance

Art is the specific. We have little to learn of apes, and they may be left. The chief consideration for us is, what particular practice of Art in letters is the best for the perusal of the Book of our common wisdom; so that with clearer minds and livelier manners we may escape, as it were, into daylight and song from a land of fog-horns. Shall we read it by the watchmaker's eye in luminous rings eruptive of the infinitesimal, or pointed with examples and types under the broad Alpine survey of the spirit born of our united social intelligence, which is the Comic Spirit? Wise men say the latter. They tell us that there is a constant tendency in the Book to accumulate excess of substance, and such repleteness, obscuring the glass it holds to mankind, renders us inexact in the recognition of our individual countenances: a perilous thing for civilization. And these wise men are strong in their opinion that we should encourage the Comic Spirit, who is, after all, our own offspring, to relieve the Book. Comedy, they say, is the true diversion, as it is likewise the key of the great Book, the music

Digitized by Google

PRELUDE
A Chapter of which the Last Page only is of any Importance

of the Book. They tell us how it condenses whole sections of the Book in a sentence, volumes in a character; so that a fair part of a book outstripping thousands of leagues when unrolled, may be compassed in one comic sitting.

For verily, say they, we must read what we can of it, at least the page before us, if we would be men. One, with an index on the Book cries out, in a style pardonable to his fervency: The remedy of your frightful affliction is here, through the stillatory of Comedy, and not in Science, nor yet in Speed, whose name is but another for voracity. Why, to be alive, to be quick in the soul, there should be diversity in the companion-throbs of your pulses. Interrogate them. They lump along like the old lob-legs of Dobbin the horse; or do their business like cudgels of carpet-thwackers expelling dust, or the cottage-clock pendulum teaching the infant hour over midnight simple arithmetic. This too in spite of Bacchus. And let them gallop; let them gallop with the God bestriding them, gallop to Hymen, gallop to Hades, they strike the same note. Monstrous monotonousness has enfolded us as with the arms of Amphitrite! We hear a shout of war for a diversion.—Comedy he pronounces to be our means of reading swiftly and comprehensively. She it is who proposes the correcting of pretentiousness, of inflation, of dulness, and of the vestiges of rawness and grossness to be found among us. She is the ultimate civilizer, the polisher, a sweet cook. If, he says, she watches over sentimentalism with a birch-rod, she is not opposed to romance. You may love, and warmly love, so long as you are honest. Do not offend

Digitized by Google

reason. A lover pretending too much by one foot's length of pretence, will have that foot caught in her trap. In Comedy is the singular scene of charity issuing of disdain under the stroke of honourable laughter: an Ariel released by Prospero's wand from the fetters of the damned witch Sycorax. And this laughter of reason refreshed is floriferous, like the magical great gale of the shifty Spring deciding for Summer. You hear it giving the delicate spirit his liberty. Listen, for comparison, to an unleavened society: a low as of the udderful cow past milking hour! O for a titled ecclesiastic to curse to excommunication that unholy thing!—So far an enthusiast perhaps; but he should have a hearing.

Concerning pathos, no ship can now set sail without pathos; and we are not totally deficient of pathos; which is, I do not accurately know what, if not the ballast, reducible to moisture by patent process, on board our modern vessel; for it can hardly be the cargo, and the general water-supply has other uses; and ships well charged with it seem to sail the stiffest:—there is a touch of pathos. The Egoist surely inspires pity. He who would desire to clothe himself at everybody's expense, and is of that desire condemned to strip himself stark naked, he, if pathos ever had a form, might be taken for the actual person. Only he is not allowed to rush at you, roll you over and squeeze your body for the briny drops. There is the innovation.

You may as well know him out of hand, as a gentleman of our time and country, of wealth and station; a not flexile figure, do what we may with

Digitized by Google

PRELUDE
A Chapter of which the Last Page only is of any Importance

him; the humour of whom scarcely dimples the surface and is distinguishable but by very penetrative, very wicked imps, whose fits of roaring below at some generally imperceptible stroke of his quality, have first made the mild literary angels aware of something comic in him, when they were one and all about to describe the gentleman on the heading of the records baldly (where brevity is most complimentary) as a gentleman of family and property, an idol of a decorous island that admires the concrete. Imps have their freakish wickedness in them to kindle detective vision: malignly do they love to uncover ridiculousness in imposing figures. Whereever they catch sight of Egoism they pitch their camps, they circle and squat, and forthwith they trim their lanterns, confident of the ludicrous to come. So confident that their grip of an English gentleman, in whom they have spied their game, never relaxes until he begins insensibly to frolic and antic, unknown to himself, and comes out in the native steam which is their scent of the chase. Instantly off they scour, Egoist and imps. They will, it is known of them, dog a great House for centuries, and be at the birth of all the new heirs in succession, diligently taking confirmatory notes, to join hands and chime their chorus in one of their merry rings round the tottering pillar of the House, when his turn arrives; as if they had (possibly they had) smelt of old date a doomed colossus of Egoism in that unborn, unconceived inheritor of the stuff of the family. They dare not be chuckling while Egoism is valiant, while sober, while socially valuable, nationally serviceable. They wait.

Digitized by Google

PRELUDE
A Chapter of which the Last Page only is of any Importance

Aforetime a grand old Egoism built the House. It would appear that ever finer essences of it are demanded to sustain the structure: but especially would it appear that a reversion to the gross original, beneath a mask and in a vein of fineness, is an earthquake at the foundations of the House. Better that it should not have consented to motion, and have held stubbornly to all ancestral ways, than have bred that anachronic spectre. The sight, however, is one to make our squatting imps in circle grow restless on their haunches, as they bend eyes instantly, ears at full cock, for the commencement of the comic drama of the suicide. If this line of verse be not yet in our literature:

Through very love of self himself he slew,

let it be admitted for his epitaph.

CHAPTER I

A Minor Incident, showing an Hereditary Aptitude in the use of the Knife

There was an ominously anxious watch of eyes visible and invisible over the infancy of Willoughby, fifth in descent from Simon Patterne, of Patterne Hall, premier of this family, a lawyer, a man of solid acquirements and stout ambition, who well understood the foundation-work of a House, and was endowed with the power of saying No to those first agents of destruction, besieging relatives. He said it with the resonant emphasis of death to younger sons. For if the oak is to become a stately tree, we must provide against

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER I
A Minor Incident, showing an Hereditary Aptitude in the use of the Knife

the crowding of timber. Also the tree beset with parasites prospers not. A great House in its beginning, lives, we may truly say, by the knife. Soil is easily got, and so are bricks, and a wife, and children come of wishing for them, but the vigorous use of the knife is a natural gift and points to growth. Pauper Patternes were numerous when the fifth head of the race was the hope of his county. A Patterne was in the Marines.

The country and the chief of this family were simultaneously informed of the existence of one Lieutenant Crossjay Patterne, of the corps of the famous hard fighters, through an act of heroism of the unpretending cool sort which kindles British blood, on the part of the modest young officer, in the storming of some eastern riverain stronghold, somewhere about the coast of China. The officer's youth was assumed on the strength of his rank, perhaps likewise from the tale of his modesty: 'he had only done his duty.' Our Willoughby was then at College, emulous of the generous enthusiasm of his years, and strangely impressed by the report, and the printing of his name in the newspapers. He thought over it for several months, when, coming to his title and heritage, he sent Lieutenant Crossjay Patterne a cheque for a sum of money amounting to the gallant fellow's pay per annum, at the same time showing his acquaintance with the first, or chemical, principles of generosity, in the remark to friends at home, that 'blood is thicker than water.' The man is a Marine, but he is a Patterne. How any Patterne should have drifted into the Marines, is of the order of questions which are senselessly asked of the great dispensary. In the complimentary letter

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER I
A Minor Incident, shewing an Hereditary Aptitude in the use of the Knife

accompanying his cheque, the lieutenant was invited to present himself at the ancestral Hall, when convenient to him, and he was assured that he had given his relative and friend a taste for a soldier's life. Young Sir Willoughby was fond of talking of his 'military namesake and distant cousin, young Patterne —the Marine.' It was funny; and not less laughable was the description of his namesake's deed of valour: with the rescued British sailor inebriate, and the hauling off to captivity of the three braves of the black dragon on a yellow ground, and the tying of them together back to back by their pigtails, and driving of them into our lines upon a newly devised dying-top style of march that inclined to the oblique, like the astonished six eyes of the celestial prisoners, for straight they could not go. The humour of gentlemen at home is always highly excited by such cool feats. We are a small island, but you see what we do. The ladies at the Hall, Sir Willoughby's mother, and his aunts Eleanor and Isabel, were more affected than he by the circumstance of their having a Patterne in the Marines. But how then! We English have ducal blood in business: we have, genealogists tell us, royal blood in common trades. For all our pride we are a queer people; and you may be ordering butcher's meat of a Tudor, sitting on the cane-bottom chairs of a Plantagenet. By and by you may . . . but cherish your reverence. Young Willoughby made a kind of shockhead or football hero of his gallant distant cousin, and wondered occasionally that the fellow had been content to despatch a letter of effusive thanks without availing himself of the invitation to partake of the hospitalities of Patterne.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER I
A Minor Incident, showing an Hereditary Aptitude in the use of the Knife

He was one afternoon parading between showers on the stately garden terrace of the Hall, in company with his affianced, the beautiful and dashing Constantia Durham, followed by knots of ladies and gentlemen vowed to fresh air before dinner, while it was to be had. Chancing with his usual happy fortune (we call these things dealt to us out of the great hidden dispensary, chance) to glance up the avenue of limes, as he was in the act of turning on his heel at the end of the terrace, and it should be added, discoursing with passion's privilege of the passion of love to Miss Durham, Sir Willoughby, who was anything but obtuse, experienced a presentiment upon espying a thick-set stumpy man crossing the gravel space from the avenue to the front steps of the Hall, decidedly *not* bearing the stamp of the gentleman 'on his hat, his coat, his feet, or anything that was his,' Willoughby subsequently observed to the ladies of his family in the Scriptural style of gentlemen who do bear the stamp. His brief sketch of the creature was repulsive. The visitor carried a bag, and his coat-collar was up, his hat was melancholy; he had the appearance of a bankrupt tradesman absconding; no gloves, no umbrella.

As to the incident we have to note, it was very slight. The card of Lieutenant Patterne was handed to Sir Willoughby, who laid it on the salver, saying to the footman: 'Not at home.'

He had been disappointed in the age, grossly deceived in the appearance of the man claiming to be his relative in this unseasonable fashion; and his acute instinct advised him swiftly of the absurdity of introducing to his friends a heavy unpresentable senior

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER I
A Minor Incident, showing an Hereditary Aptitude in the use of the Knife

as the celebrated gallant Lieutenant of Marines, and the same as a member of his family! He had talked of the man too much, too enthusiastically, to be able to do so. A young subaltern, even if passably vulgar in figure, can be shuffled through by the aid of the heroical story humourously exaggerated in apology for his aspect. Nothing can be done with a mature and stumpy Marine of that rank. Considerateness dismisses him on the spot, without parley. It was performed by a gentleman supremely advanced at a very early age in the art of cutting.

Young Sir Willoughby spoke a word of the rejected visitor to Miss Durham, in response to her startled look: 'I shall drop him a cheque,' he said, for she seemed personally wounded, and had a face of crimson.

The young lady did not reply.

Dating from the humble departure of Lieutenant Crossjay Patterne up the limes-avenue under a gathering rain-cloud, the ring of imps in attendance on Sir Willoughby maintained their station with strict observation of his movements at all hours; and were comparisons in quest, the sympathetic eagerness of the eyes of caged monkeys for the hand about to feed them, would supply one. They perceived in him a fresh development and very subtle manifestation of the very old thing from which he had sprung.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II

The Young Sir Willoughby

These little scoundrel imps, who have attained to some respectability as the dogs and pets of the Comic Spirit, had been curiously attentive three years earlier, long before the public announcement of his engagement to the beautiful Miss Durham, on the day of Sir Willoughby's majority, when Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson said her word of him. Mrs. Mountstuart was a lady certain to say the remembered, if not the right, thing. Again and again was it confirmed on days of high celebration, days of birth or bridal, how sure she was to hit the mark that rang the bell; and away her word went over the county: and had she been an uncharitable woman she could have ruled the county with an iron rod of caricature, so sharp was her touch. A grain of malice would have sent county faces and characters awry into the currency. She was wealthy and kindly, and resembled our mother Nature in her reasonable antipathies to one or two things which none can defend, and her decided preference of persons that shone in the sun. Her word sprang out of her. She looked at you, and forth it came: and it stuck to you, as nothing laboured or literary could have adhered. Her saying of Lætitia Dale: 'Here she comes, with a romantic tale on her eyelashes,' was a portrait of Lætitia. And that of Vernon Whitford: 'He is a Phœbus Apollo turned fasting friar,' painted the

Digitized by Google

sunken brilliancy of the lean long-walker and scholar at a stroke.

Of the young Sir Willoughby, her word was brief; and there was the merit of it on a day when he was hearing from sunrise to the setting of the moon salutes in his honour, songs of praise and Ciceronian eulogy. Rich, handsome, courteous, generous, lord of the Hall, the feast, and the dance, he excited his guests of both sexes to a holiday of flattery. And, says Mrs. Mountstuart, while grand phrases were mouthing round about him: '*You see he has a leg.*'

That you saw, of course. But after she had spoken you saw much more. Mrs. Mountstuart said it just as others utter empty nothings, with never a hint of a stress. Her word was taken up, and very soon, from the extreme end of the long drawing-room, the circulation of something of Mrs. Mountstuart's was distinctly perceptible. Lady Patterne sent a little Hebe down, skirting the dancers, for an accurate report of it; and even the inappreciative lips of a very young lady transmitting the word could not damp the impression of its weighty truthfulness. It was perfect! Adulation of the young Sir Willoughby's beauty and wit, and aristocratic bearing and mien, and of his moral virtues, was common; welcome if you like, as a form of homage; but common, almost vulgar, beside Mrs. Mountstuart's quiet little touch of nature. In seeming to say infinitely less than others, as Miss Isabel Patterne pointed out to Lady Busshe, Mrs. Mountstuart comprised all that the others had said, by showing the needlessness of allusions to the saliently evident. She was the aristocrat reproving the provincial. 'He is everything you have had the

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II
The Young Sir Willoughby

goodness to remark, ladies and dear sirs, he talks charmingly, dances divinely, rides with the air of a commander-in-chief, has the most natural grand pose possible without ceasing for a moment to be the young English gentleman he is. Alcibiades, fresh from a Louis IV. perruquier, could not surpass him: whatever you please; I could outdo you in sublime comparisons, were I minded to pelt him. Have you noticed that he has a leg?'

So might it be amplified. A simple-seeming word of this import is the triumph of the spiritual, and where it passes for coin of value, the society has reached a high refinement: Arcadian by the æsthetic route. Observation of Willoughby was not, as Miss Eleanor Patterne pointed out to Lady Culmer, drawn down to the leg, but directed to estimate him from the leg upward. That, however, is prosaic. Dwell a short space on Mrs. Mountstuart's word; and whither, into what fair region, and with how decorously voluptuous a sensation, do not we fly, who have, through mournful veneration of the Martyr Charles, a coy attachment to the Court of his Merrie Son, where the leg was ribanded with love-knots and reigned. Oh! it was a naughty Court. Yet have we dreamed of it as the period when an English cavalier was grace incarnate; far from the boor now hustling us in another sphere; beautifully mannered, every gesture dulcet. And if the ladies were . . . we will hope they have been traduced. But if they were, if they were too tender, ah! gentlemen were gentlemen then — worth perishing for! There is this dream in the English country; and it must be an aspiration after some form of melodious gentlemanliness which is imagined to have inhabited

Digitized by Google

the island at one time; as among our poets the dream of the period of a circle of chivalry here is encouraged for the pleasure of the imagination.

Mrs. Mountstuart touched a thrilling chord. 'In spite of men's hateful modern costume, you see he has a leg.'

That is, the leg of the born cavalier is before you: and obscure it as you will, dress degenerately, there it is for ladies who have eyes. You *see* it: or, you see *he* has it. Miss Isabel and Miss Eleanor disputed the incidence of the emphasis, but surely, though a slight difference of meaning may be heard, either will do: many, with a good show of reason, throw the accent upon *leg*. And the ladies knew for a fact that Willoughby's leg was exquisite; he had a cavalier court-suit in his wardrobe. Mrs. Mountstuart signified that the leg was to be seen because it was a burning leg. There it is, and it *will* shine through! He has the leg of Rochester, Buckingham, Dorset, Suckling; the leg that smiles, that winks, is obsequious to you, yet perforce of beauty self-satisfied; that twinkles to a tender midway between imperiousness and seductiveness, audacity and discretion; between 'you shall worship me,' and 'I am devoted to you'; is your lord, your slave, alternately and in one. It is a leg of ebb and flow and high-tide ripples. Such a leg, when it has done with pretending to retire, will walk straight into the hearts of women. Nothing so fatal to them.

Self-satisfied it must be. Humbleness does not win multitudes or the sex. It must be vain to have a sheen. Captivating melodies (to prove to you the unavoidableness of self-satisfaction when you know

Digitized by Google

that you have hit perfection), listen to them closely, have an inner pipe of that conceit almost ludicrous when you detect the chirp.

And you need not be reminded that he has the leg without the naughtiness. You see eminent in him what we would fain have brought about in a nation that has lost its leg in gaining a possibly cleaner morality. And that is often contested; but there is no doubt of the loss of the leg.

Well, footmen and courtiers and Scottish highlanders, and the corps de ballet, draymen too, have legs, and staring legs, shapely enough. But what are they? not the modulated instrument we mean—simply legs for leg-work, dumb as the brutes. Our cavalier's is the poetic leg, a portent, a valiance. He has it as Cicero had a tongue. It is a lute to scatter songs to his mistress; a rapier, is she obdurate. In sooth a leg with brains in it, soul.

And its shadows are an ambush, its lights a surprise. It blushes, it pales, can whisper, exclaim. It is a peep, a part revelation, just sufferable, of the Olympian god—Jove playing carpet-knight.

For the young Sir Willoughby's family and his thoughtful admirers, it is not too much to say that Mrs. Mountstuart's little word fetched an epoch of our history to colour the evening of his arrival at man's estate. He was all that Merrie Charles's Court should have been, subtracting not a sparkle from what it was. Under this light he danced, and you may consider the effect of it on his company.

He had received the domestic education of a prince. Little princes abound in a land of heaped riches. Where they have not to yield military service to an

Digitized by Google

Imperial master, they are necessarily here and there dainty during youth, sometimes unmanageable, and as they are bound in no personal duty to the State, each is for himself, with full present, and what is more, luxurious prospective leisure for the practice of that allegiance. They are sometimes enervated by it: that must be in continental countries. Happily our climate and our brave blood precipitate the greater number upon the hunting-field, to do the public service of heading the chase of the fox, with benefit to their constitutions. Hence a manly as well as useful race of little princes, and Willoughby was as manly as any. He cultivated himself, he would not be outdone in popular accomplishments. Had the standard of the public taste been set in philosophy, and the national enthusiasm centred in philosophers, he would at least have worked at books. He did work at science, and had a laboratory. His admirable passon to excel, however, was chiefly directed in his youth upon sport; and so great was the passion in him, that it was commonly the presence of rivals which led him to the declaration of love.

He knew himself nevertheless to be the most constant of men in his attachment to the sex. He had never discouraged Lætitia Dale's devotion to him, and even when he followed in the sweeping tide of the beautiful Constantia Durham (whom Mrs. Mountstuart called 'The Racing Cutter'), he thought of Lætitia, and looked at her. She was a shy violet.

Willoughby's comportment while the showers of adulation drenched him might be likened to the composure of Indian Gods undergoing worship, but unlike

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II
The Young Sir Willoughby

them he reposed upon no seat of amplitude to preserve him from a betrayal of intoxication; he had to continue tripping, dancing, exactly balancing himself, head to right, head to left, addressing his idolaters in phrases of perfect choiceness. This is only to say, that it is easier to be a wooden idol than one in the flesh; yet Willoughby was equal to his task. The little prince's education teaches him that he is other than you, and by virtue of the instruction he receives, and also something, we know not what, within, he is enabled to maintain his posture where you would be tottering. Urchins upon whose curly pates grey seniors lay their hands with conventional encomium and speculation, look older than they are immediately, and Willoughby looked older than his years, not for want of freshness, but because he felt that he had to stand eminently and correctly poised.

Hearing of Mrs. Mountstuart's word on him, he smiled and said: 'It is at her service.'

The speech was communicated to her, and she proposed to attach a dedicatory strip of silk. And then they came together, and there was wit and repartee suitable to the electrical atmosphere of the dancing-room, on the march to a magical hall of supper. Willoughby conducted Mrs. Mountstuart to the supper-table.

'Were I,' said she, 'twenty years younger, I think I would marry you, to cure my infatuation.'

'Then let me tell you in advance, madam,' said he, 'that I will do everything to obtain a new lease of it, except divorce you.'

They were infinitely wittier, but so much was heard and may be reported.

Digitized by Google

'It makes the business of choosing a wife for him superhumanly difficult!' Mrs. Mountstuart observed, after listening to the praises she had set going again when the ladies were weeded of us, in Lady Patterne's Indian room, and could converse unhampered upon their own ethereal themes.

'Willoughby will choose a wife for himself,' said his mother.

CHAPTER III

Constantia Durham

The great question for the county was debated in many households, daughter-thronged and daughterless, long subsequent to the memorable day of Willoughby's coming of age. Lady Busshe was for Constantia Durham. She laughed at Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson's notion of Lætitia Dale. She was a little older than Mrs. Mountstuart, and had known Willoughby's father, whose marriage into the wealthiest branch of the Whitford family had been strictly sagacious. 'Patternes marry money: they are not romantic people,' she said. Miss Durham had money, and she had health and beauty: three mighty qualifications for a Patterne bride. Her father, Sir John Durham, was a large landowner in the western division of the county; a pompous gentleman, the picture of a father-in-law for Willoughby. The father of Miss Dale was a battered army surgeon from India, tenant of one of Sir Willoughby's cottages bordering Patterne Park. His girl was portionless and a poetess. Her writing of the song in celebration of the young baronet's

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III Constantia Durham

birthday was thought a clever venture, bold as only your timid creatures can be bold. She let the cat out of her bag of verse before the multitude; she almost proposed to her hero in her rhymes. She was pretty, her eyelashes were long and dark, her eyes dark blue, and her soul was ready to shoot like a rocket out of them at a look from Willoughby. And he looked, he certainly looked, though he did not dance with her once that night, and danced repeatedly with Miss Durham. He gave Lætitia to Vernon Whitford for the final dance of the night, and he may have looked at her so much in pity of an elegant girl allied to such a partner. The 'Phœbus Apollo turned fasting friar' had entirely forgotten his musical gifts in motion. He crossed himself and crossed his bewildered lady, and crossed everybody in the figure, extorting shouts of cordial laughter from his cousin Willoughby. Be it said that the hour was four in the morning, when dancers must laugh at somebody, if only to refresh their feet, and the wit of the hour administers to the wildest laughter. Vernon was likened to Theseus in the maze, entirely dependent upon his Ariadne; to a fly released from a jam-pot; to a 'salvage,' or green, man caught in a web of nymphs and made to go the paces. Willoughby was inexhaustible in the happy similes he poured out to Miss Durham across the lines of Sir Roger de Coverley, and they were not forgotten, they procured him a reputation as a convivial sparkler. Rumour went the round that he intended to give Lætitia to Vernon for good, when he could decide to take Miss Durham to himself; his generosity was famous; but that decision, though the rope was in the form of a knot, seemed reluctant for the con-

Digitized by Google

clusive close haul; it preferred the state of slackness; and if he courted Lætitia on behalf of his cousin, his cousinly love must have been greater that his passion, one had to suppose. He was generous enough for it, or for marrying the portionless girl himself.

There was a story of a brilliant young widow of our aristocracy who had very nearly snared him. Why should he object to marry into our aristocracy? Mrs. Mountstuart asked him, and he replied, that the girls of that class have no money, and he doubted the quality of their blood. He had his eyes awake. His duty to his House was a foremost thought with him, and for such a reason he may have been more anxious to give the slim and not robust Lætitia to Vernon than accede to his personal inclination. The mention of the widow singularly offended him, notwithstanding the high rank of the lady named. 'A widow?' he said. 'I!' He spoke to a widow; an oldish one truly; but his wrath at the suggestion of his union with a widow, led him to be for the moment oblivious of the minor shades of good taste. He desired Mrs. Mountstuart to contradict the story in positive terms. He repeated his desire; he was urgent to have it contradicted, and said again: 'A widow!' straightening his whole figure to the erectness of the letter I. She was a widow unmarried a second time, and it has been known of the stedfast women who retain the name of their first husband, or do not hamper his title with a little new squire at their skirts, that they can partially approve the objections indicated by Sir Willoughby. They are thinking of themselves when they do so, and they will rarely say, 'I might have married'; rarely within them will they avow that,

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III Constantia Durham

with their permission, it might have been. They can catch an idea of a gentleman's view of the widow's cap. But a niceness that could feel sharply wounded by the simple rumour of his alliance with the young relict of an earl, was mystifying. Sir Willoughby unbent. His military letter I took a careless glance at itself lounging idly and proudly at ease in the glass of his mind, decked with a wanton wreath, as he dropped a hint, generously vague, just to show the origin of the rumour, and the excellent basis it had for not being credited. He was chidden. Mrs. Mountstuart read him a lecture. She was however able to contradict the tale of the young countess. 'There is no fear of his marrying her, my dears.'

Meanwhile there was a fear that he would lose his chance of marrying the beautiful Miss Durham.

The dilemmas of little princes are often grave. They should be dwelt on now and then for an example to poor struggling commoners of the slings and arrows assailing fortune's most favoured men, that we may preach contentment to the wretch who cannot muster wherewithal to marry a wife, or has done it and trots the streets, pack-laden, to maintain the dame and troops of children painfully reared to fill subordinate stations. According to our reading, a moral is always welcome in a moral country, and especially so when silly envy is to be chastized by it, the restless craving for change rebuked. Young Sir Willoughby, then, stood in this dilemma:—a lady was at either hand of him; the only two that had ever, apart from metropolitan conquests, not to be recited, touched his emotions. Susceptible to beauty, he had never seen so beautiful a girl as Constantia Durham. Equally

Digitized by Google

susceptible to admiration of himself, he considered Lætitia Dale a paragon of cleverness. He stood between the queenly rose and the modest violet. One he bowed to; the other bowed to him. He could not have both; it is the law governing princes and pedestrians alike. But which could he forfeit? His growing acquaintance with the world taught him to put an increasing price on the sentiments of Miss Dale. Still Constantia's beauty was of a kind to send away beholders aching. She had the glory of the racing cutter full sail on a winning breeze; and she did not court to win him, she flew. In his more reflective hour the attractiveness of that lady which held the mirror to his features was paramount. But he had passionate snatches when the magnetism of the flyer drew him in her wake. Further to add to the complexity, he loved his liberty; he was princelier free; he had more subjects, more slaves; he ruled arrogantly in the world of women; he was more himself. His metropolitan experiences did not answer to his liking the particular question, Do we bind the woman down to us idolatrously by making a wife of her?

In the midst of his deliberations, a report of the hot pursuit of Miss Durham, casually mentioned to him by Lady Busshe, drew an immediate proposal from Sir Willoughby. She accepted him, and they were engaged. She had been nibbled at, all but eaten up, while he hung dubitative; and though that was the cause of his winning her, it offended his niceness. She had not come to him out of cloistral purity, out of perfect radiancy. Spiritually, likewise, was he a little prince, a despotic prince. He wished for her to

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III Constantia Durham

have come to him out of an egg-shell, somewhat more astonished at things than a chicken, but as completely enclosed before he tapped the shell, and seeing him with her sex's eyes first of all men. She talked frankly of her cousins and friends, young males. She could have replied to his bitter wish: 'Had you asked me on the night of your twenty-first birthday, Willoughby!' Since then she had been in the dust of the world, and he conceived his peculiar antipathy, destined to be so fatal to him, from the earlier hours of his engagement. He was quaintly incapable of a jealousy of individuals. A young Captain Oxford had been foremost in the swarm pursuing Constantia. Willoughby thought as little of Captain Oxford as he did of Vernon Whitford. His enemy was the world, the mass, which confounds us in a lump, which has breathed on her whom we have selected, whom we cannot, can never, rub quite clear of her contact with the abominated crowd. The pleasure of the world is to bowl down our soldierly letter I; to encroach on our identity, soil our niceness. To begin to think is the beginning of disgust of the world.

As soon as the engagement was published, all the county said that there had not been a chance for Lætitia, and Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson humbly remarked, in an attitude of penitence: 'I'm not a witch.' Lady Busshe could claim to be one; she had foretold the event. Lætitia was of the same opinion as the county. She had looked up, but not hopefully. She had only looked up to the brightest, and, as he was the highest, how could she have hoped? She was the solitary companion of a sick father, whose inveterate prognostic of her, that she would

Digitized by Google

live to rule at Patterne Hall, tortured the poor girl in proportion as he seemed to derive comfort from it. The noise of the engagement merely silenced him; recluse invalids cling obstinately to their ideas. He had observed Sir Willoughby in the society of his daughter, when the young baronet revived to a sprightly boyishness immediately. Indeed, as big boy and little girl, they had played together of old. Willoughby had been a handsome fair boy. The portrait of him at the Hall, in a hat, leaning on his pony, with crossed legs and long flaxen curls over his shoulders, was the image of her soul's most present angel; and, as a man, he had—she did not suppose intentionally—subjected her nature to bow to him; so submissive was she, that it was fuller happiness for her to think him right in all his actions than to imagine the circumstances different. This may appear to resemble the ecstasy of the devotee of Juggernaut. It is a form of the passion inspired by little princes, and we need not marvel that a conservative sex should assist to keep them in their lofty places. What were there otherwise to look up to? We should have no dazzling beacon-lights if they were levelled and treated as clod earth; and it is worth while for here and there a woman to be burnt, so long as women's general adoration of an ideal young man shall be preserved. Purity is our demand of them. They may justly cry for attraction. They cannot have it brighter than in the universal bearing of the eyes of their sisters upon a little prince, one who has the ostensible virtues in his pay, and can practise them without injuring himself to make himself unsightly. Let

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III Constantia Durham

the races of men be by-and-by astonished at their Gods, if they please. Meantime they had better continue to worship.

Lætitia did continue. She saw Miss Durham at Patterne on several occasions. She admired the pair. She had a wish to witness the bridal ceremony. She was looking forward to the day with that mixture of eagerness and witholding which we have as we draw nigh the disenchanting termination of an enchanting romance, when Sir Willoughby met her on a Sunday morning, as she crossed his park solitarily to church. They were within ten days of the appointed ceremony. He should have been away at Miss Durham's end of the county. He had, Lætitia knew, ridden over to her the day before; but here he was; and very unwontedly, quite surprisingly, he presented his arm to conduct Lætitia to the church-door, and talked and laughed in a way that reminded her of a hunting gentleman she had seen once rising to his feet, staggering from an ugly fall across hedge and fence into one of the lanes of her short winter walks: 'All 's well, all sound, never better, only a scratch!' the gentleman had said, as he reeled and pressed a bleeding head. Sir Willoughby chattered of his felicity in meeting her. 'I am really wonderfully lucky,' he said, and he said that and other things over and over, incessantly talking, and telling an anecdote of county occurrences, and laughing at it with a mouth that would not widen. He went on talking in the church porch, and murmuring softly some steps up the aisle, passing the pews of Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson and Lady Busshe. Of course he was entertaining, but what a strangeness it was to Lætitia!

Digitized by Google

His face would have been half under an antique bonnet. It came very close to hers, and the scrutiny he bent on her was most solicitous.

After the service, he avoided the great ladies by sauntering up to within a yard or two of where she sat; he craved her hand on his arm to lead her forth by the park entrance to the church, all the while bending to her, discoursing rapidly, appearing radiantly interested in her quiet replies, with fits of intentness that stared itself out into dim abstraction. She hazarded the briefest replies for fear of not having understood him.

One question she asked: 'Miss Durham is well, I trust?'

And he answered: 'Durham?' and said: 'There is no Miss Durham to my knowledge.'

The impression he left with her was, that he might yesterday during his ride have had an accident and fallen on his head.

She would have asked that, if she had not known him for so thorough an Englishman, in his dislike to have it thought that accidents could hurt even when they happened to him.

He called the next day to claim her for a walk. He assured her she had promised it, and he appealed to her father, who could not testify to a promise he had not heard, but begged her to leave him to have her walk. So once more she was in the park with Sir Willoughby, listening to his raptures over old days. A word of assent from her sufficed him. 'I am now myself,' was one of the remarks he repeated this day. She dilated on the beauty of the Park and the Hall to gratify him.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III Constantia Durham

He did not speak of Miss Durham, and Lætitia became afraid to mention her name.

At their parting, Willoughby promised Lætitia that he would call on the morrow. He did not come; and she could well excuse him, after her hearing of the tale.

It was a lamentable tale. He had ridden to Sir John Durham's mansion, a distance of thirty miles, to hear, on his arrival, that Constantia had quitted her father's house two days previously on a visit to an aunt in London, and had just sent word that she was the wife of Captain Oxford, hussar, and messmate of one of her brothers. A letter from the bride awaited Willoughby at the Hall. He had ridden back at night, not caring how he used his horse in order to get swiftly home, so forgetful of himself was he under the terrible blow. That was the night of Saturday. On the day following, being Sunday, he met Lætitia in his park, led her to church, led her out of it, and the day after that, previous to his disappearance for some weeks, was walking with her in full view of the carriages along the road.

He had indeed, you see, been very fortunately, if not considerately, liberated by Miss Durham. He, as a man of honour, could not have taken the initiative, but the frenzy of a jealous girl might urge her to such a course; and how little he suffered from it had been shown to the world. Miss Durham, the story went, was his mother's choice for him, against his heart's inclinations; which had finally subdued Lady Patterne. Consequently, there was no longer an obstacle between Sir Willoughby and Miss Dale. It was a pleasant and romantic story, and it put most people in good humour

Digitized by Google

with the county's favourite, as his choice of a portionless girl of no position would not have done without the shock of astonishment at the conduct of Miss Durham, and the desire to feel that so prevailing a gentleman was not in any degree pitiable. Constantia was called 'that mad thing.' Lætitia broke forth in novel and abundant merits; and one of the chief points of requisition in relation to Patterne—a Lady Willoughby who would entertain well and animate the deadness of the Hall, became a certainty when her gentleness and liveliness and exceeding cleverness were considered. She was often a visitor at the Hall by Lady Patterne's express invitation, and sometimes on these occasions Willoughby was there too, superintending the fitting up of his laboratory, though he was not at home to the county; it was not expected that he should be yet. He had taken heartily to the pursuit of science, and spoke of little else. Science, he said, was in our days the sole object worth a devoted pursuit. But the sweeping remark could hardly apply to Lætitia, of whom he was the courteous quiet wooer you behold when a man has broken loose from an unhappy tangle to return to the lady of his first and strongest affections.

Some months of homely courtship ensued, and then, the decent interval prescribed by the situation having elapsed, Sir Willoughby Patterne left his native land on a tour of the globe.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV

Lætitia Dale

That was another surprise to the county.

Let us not inquire into the feelings of patiently starving women: they must obtain some sustenance of their own, since, as you perceive, they live; evidently they are not in need of a great amount of nourishment; and we may set them down for creatures with a rush-light of animal fire to warm them. They cannot have much vitality who are so little exclamatory. A corresponding sentiment of patient compassion, akin to scorn, is provoked by persons having the opportunity for pathos and declining to use it. The public bosom was open to Lætitia for several weeks, and had she run to it to bewail herself, she would have been cherished in thankfulness for a country drama. There would have been a party against her, cold people, critical of her pretensions to rise from an unrecognized sphere to be mistress of Patterne Hall; but there would also have been a party against Sir Willoughby, composed of the two or three revolutionists, tired of the yoke, which are to be found in England when there is a stir; a larger number of born sympathetics, ever ready to yield the tear for the tear; and here and there a Samaritan soul prompt to succour poor humanity in distress. The opportunity passed undramatized. Lætitia presented herself at church with a face mildly devout, according to her custom, and she accepted invitations to the Hall, she assisted at the reading of Willoughby's letters to his family, and

Digitized by Google

fed on dry husks of him wherein her name was not mentioned; never one note of the summoning call for pathos did this young lady blow.

So, very soon the public bosom closed. She had, under the fresh interpretation of affairs, too small a spirit to be Lady Willoughby of Patterne; she could not have entertained becomingly; he must have seen that the girl was not the match for him in station, and off he went to conquer the remainder of a troublesome first attachment, no longer extremely disturbing, to judge from the tenour of his letters: really incomparable letters! Lady Busshe and Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson enjoyed a perusal of them. Sir Willoughby appeared as a splendid young representative island lord in these letters to his family, despatched from the principal cities of the United States of America. He would give them a sketch of 'our democratic cousins,' he said. Such cousins! They might all have been in the Marines. He carried his English standard over that Continent, and by simply jotting down facts, he left an idea of the results of the measurement to his family and friends at home. He was an adept in the irony of incongruously grouping. The nature of the Equality under the stars and stripes was presented in this manner. Equality! Reflections came occasionally: — 'These cousins of ours are highly amusing. I am among the descendants of the Roundheads. Now and then an allusion to old domestic differences, in perfect good temper. We go on in our way; they theirs, in the apparent belief that Republicanism operates remarkable changes in human nature. Vernon tries hard to think it does. The upper ten of our cousins are the Infernal of Paris.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV
Lætitia Dale

The rest of them is Radical England, as far as I am acquainted with that section of my country.'—Where we compared, they were absurd; where we contrasted, they, were monstrous. The contrast of Vernon's letters with Willoughby's was just as extreme. You could hardly have taken them for relatives travelling together, or Vernon Whitford for a born and bred Englishman. The same scenes furnished by these two pens might have been sketched in different hemispheres. Vernon had no irony. He had nothing of Willoughby's epistolary creative power, which, causing his family and friends to exclaim, 'How like him that is!' conjured them across the broad Atlantic to behold and clap hands at his lordliness.

They saw him distinctly, as with the naked eye: a word, a turn of the pen, or a word unsaid, offered the picture of him in America, Japan, China, Australia, nay, the Continent of Europe, holding an English review of his Maker's grotesques. Vernon seemed a sheepish fellow, without stature abroad, glad of a compliment, grateful for a dinner, endeavouring sadly to digest all he saw and heard. But one was a Patterne; the other a Whitford. One had genius; the other pottered after him with the title of student. One was the English gentleman wherever he went; the other was a new kind of thing, nondescript, produced in England of late, and not likely to come to much good himself, or do much good to the country.

Vernon's dancing in America was capitally described by Willoughby. 'Adieu to our cousins!' the latter wrote on his voyage to Japan. 'I may possibly have had some vogue in their ball-rooms, and in showing them an English seat on horseback: I must resign my-

Digitized by Google

self if I have not been popular among them. I could not sing their national song—if a congery of States be a nation—and I must confess I listened with frigid politeness to their singing of it. A great people, no doubt. Adieu to them. I have had to tear old Vernon away. He had serious thoughts of settling, means to correspond with some of them.' On the whole, forgetting two or more 'traits of insolence' on the part of his hosts, which he cited, Willoughby escaped pretty comfortably. The President had been, consciously or not, uncivil, but one knew his origin! Upon these interjections, placable flicks of the lionly tail addressed to Britannia the Ruler, who expected him in some mildish way to lash terga cauda in retiring, Sir Willoughby Patterne passed from a land of alien manners; and ever after he spoke of America respectfully and pensively, with a tail tucked in, as it were. His travels were profitable to himself. The fact is, that there are cousins who come to greatness and must be pacified, or they will prove annoying. Heaven forefend a collision between cousins!

Willoughby returned to his England after an absence of three years. On a fair April morning, the last of the month, he drove along his park palings, and by the luck of things, Lætitia was the first of his friends whom he met. She was crossing from field to field with a band of school-children, gathering wild flowers for the morrow May-day. He sprang to the ground and seized her hand. 'Lætitia Dale!' he said. He panted. 'Your name is sweet English music! And you are well?' The anxious question permitted him to read deeply in her eyes. He found the man he sought there, squeezed him passionately, and let her

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV
Lætitia Dale

go, saying, 'I could not have prayed for a lovelier home-scene to welcome me than you and these children flower-gathering. I don't believe in chance. It was decreed that we should meet. Do not you think so?'

Lætitia breathed faintly of her gladness.

He begged her to distribute a gold coin among the little ones; asked for the names of some of them, and repeated, 'Mary, Susan, Charlotte—only the Christian names, pray! Well, my dears, you will bring your garlands to the Hall to-morrow morning; and mind, early! no slugabeds to-morrow; I suppose I am browned, Lætitia?' He smiled in apology for the foreign sun, and murmured with rapture, 'The green of this English country is unsurpassed. It is wonderful. Leave England and be baked, if you would appreciate it. You can't, unless you taste exile as I have done—for how many years? How many?'

'Three,' said Lætitia.

'Thirty!' said he. 'It seems to me that length. At least, I am immensely older. But looking at you, I could think it less than three. You have not changed. You are absolutely unchanged. I am bound to hope so. I shall see you soon. I have much to talk of, much to tell you. I shall hasten to call on your father. I have specially to speak with him. I—what happiness this is, Lætitia! But I must not forget I have a mother. Adieu; for some hours—not for many!'

He pressed her hand again. He was gone.

She dismissed the children to their homes. Plucking primroses was hard labour now—a dusty business. She could have wished that her planet had not descended to earth, his presence agitated her so;

Digitized by Google

but his enthusiastic patriotism was like a shower that in the Spring season of the year sweeps against the hard-binding East and melts the air, and brings out new colours, makes life flow; and her thoughts recurred in wonderment to the behaviour of Constantia Durham. That was Lætitia's manner of taking up her weakness once more. She could almost have reviled the woman who had given this beneficent magician, this pathetic exile, of the aristocratic sunburnt visage and deeply scrutinizing eyes, cause for grief. How deeply his eyes could read! The starveling of patience awoke to the idea of a feast. The sense of hunger came with it, and hope came, and patience fled. She would have rejected hope to keep patience nigh her; but surely it cannot always be Winter! said her reasoning blood, and we must excuse her as best we can if she was assured by her restored warmth that Willoughby came in the order of the revolving seasons, marking a long Winter past. He had specially to speak with her father, he had said. What could that mean? What but——! She dared not phrase it or view it.

At their next meeting she was 'Miss Dale.'

A week later he was closeted with her father.

Mr. Dale, in the evening of that pregnant day, eulogized Sir Willoughby as a landlord. A new lease of the cottage was to be granted him on the old terms, he said. Except that Sir Willoughby had congratulated him in the possession of an excellent daughter, their interview was one of landlord and tenant, it appeared; and Lætitia said, 'So we shall not have to leave the cottage?' in a tone of satisfaction, while she quietly gave a wrench to the

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV
Lætitia Dale

neck of the young hope in her breast. At night her diary received the line: 'This day I was a fool. To-morrow?'

To-morrow and many days after there were dashes instead of words.

Patience travelled back to her sullenly. As we must have some kind of food, and she had nothing else, she took to that and found it dryer than of yore. It is a composing but a lean dietary. The dead are patient, and we get a certain likeness to them in feeding on it unintermittingly overlong. Her hollowed cheeks with the fallen leaf in them pleaded against herself to justify her idol for not looking down on one like her. She saw him when he was at the Hall. He did not notice any change. He was exceedingly gentle and courteous. More than once she discovered his eyes dwelling on her, and then he looked hurriedly at his mother, and Lætitia had to shut her mind from thinking lest thinking should be a sin and hope a guilty spectre. But had his mother objected to her? She could not avoid asking herself. His tour of the globe had been undertaken at his mother's desire; she was an ambitious lady, in failing health; and she wished to have him living with her at Patterne, yet seemed to agree that he did wisely to reside in London.

One day Sir Willoughby, in the quiet manner which was his humour, informed her that he had become a country gentleman; he had abandoned London, he loathed it as the burial-place of the individual man. He intended to sit down on his estates and have his cousin Vernon Whitford to

Digitized by Google

assist him in managing them, he said; and very amusing was his description of his cousin's shifts to live by literature, and add enough to a beggarly income to get his usual two months of the year in the Alps. Previous to his great tour, Willoughby had spoken of Vernon's judgement with derision; nor was it entirely unknown that Vernon had offended his family pride by some extravagant act. But after their return he acknowledged Vernon's talents, and seemed unable to do without him.

The new arrangement gave Lætitia a companion for her walks. Pedestrianism was a sour business to Willoughby, whose exclamation of the word indicated a willingness for any amount of exercise on horseback; but she had no horse, and so, while he hunted, Lætitia and Vernon walked, and the neighbourhood speculated on the circumstances, until the ladies Eleanor and Isabel Patterne engaged her more frequently for carriage exercise, and Sir Willoughby was observed riding beside them.

A real and sunny pleasure befell Lætitia, in the establishment of young Crossjay Patterne under her roof; the son of the lieutenant, now captain, of Marines; a boy of twelve, with the sprights of twelve boys in him, for whose board and lodgement Vernon provided by arrangement with her father. Vernon was one of your men that have no occupation for their money, no bills to pay for repair of their property, and are insane to spend. He had heard of Captain Patterne's large family, and proposed to have his eldest boy at the Hall, to teach him; but Willoughby declined to house the son of such a father, predicting that the boy's hair would be red, his skin eruptive, and his

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV
Lætitia Dale

practices detestable. So Vernon, having obtained Mr. Dale's consent to accommodate this youth, stalked off to Devonport, and brought back a rosy-cheeked, round-bodied rogue of a boy, who fell upon meats and puddings, and defeated them, with a captivating simplicity in his confession that he had never had enough to eat in his life. He had gone through a training for a plentiful table. At first, after a number of helps, young Crossjay would sit and sigh heavily, in contemplation of the unfinished dish. Subsequently, he told his host and hostess that he had two sisters above his own age, and three brothers and two sisters younger than he: 'All hungry!' said the boy.

His pathos was most comical. It was a good month before he could see pudding taken away from table without a sigh of regret that he could not finish it as deputy for the Devonport household. The pranks of the little fellow, and his revel in a country life, and muddy wildness in it, amused Lætitia from morning to night. She, when she had caught him, taught him in the morning; Vernon, favoured by the chase, in the afternoon. Young Crossjay would have enlivened any household. He was not only indolent, he was opposed to the acquisition of knowledge through the medium of books, and would say: 'But I don't want to!' in a tone to make a logician thoughtful. Nature was very strong in him. He had, on each return of the hour for instruction, to be plucked out of the earth, rank of the soil, like a root, for the exercise of his big round headpiece on those tyrannous puzzles. But the habits of birds, and the place for their eggs, and the management of rabbits, and the tickling of fish, and poaching joys with combative boys of the district,

Digitized by Google

and how to wheedle a cook for a luncheon for a whole day in the rain, he soon knew of his great nature. His passion for our naval service was a means of screwing his attention to lessons after he had begun to understand that the desert had to be traversed to attain midshipman's rank. He boasted ardently of his fighting father, and, chancing to be near the Hall as he was talking to Vernon and Lætitia of his father, he propounded a question close to his heart; and he put it in these words, following: 'My father's the one to lead an army!' when he paused: 'I say, Mr. Whitford, Sir Willoughby's kind to me, and gives me crown-pieces, why wouldn't he see my father, and my father came here ten miles in the rain to see him, and had to walk ten miles back, and sleep at an inn?'

The only answer to be given was, that Sir Willoughby could not have been at home. 'Oh! my father saw him, and Sir Willoughby said he was not at home,' the boy replied, producing an odd ring in the ear by his repetition of 'not at home' in the same voice as the apology, plainly innocent of malice. Vernon told Lætitia, however, that the boy never asked an explanation of Sir Willoughby.

Unlike the horse of the adage, it was easier to compel young Crossjay to drink of the waters of instruction than to get him to the brink. His heart was not so antagonistic as his nature, and by degrees, owing to a proper mixture of discipline and cajolery, he imbibed. He was whistling at the cook's windows after a day of wicked truancy, on an April night, and reported adventures over the supper supplied to him. Lætitia entered the kitchen with a reproving forefinger. He jumped to kiss her, and went on chattering

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV
Lætitia Dale

of a place fifteen miles distant, where he had seen Sir Willoughby riding with a young lady. The impossibility that the boy should have got so far on foot made Lætitia doubtful of his veracity, until she heard that a gentleman had taken him up on the road in a gig, and had driven him to a farm to show him strings of birds' eggs and stuffed birds of every English kind, kingfishers, yaffles, black woodpeckers, goatsucker owls, more mouth than head, with dusty, dark-spotted wings, like moths; all very circumstantial. Still, in spite of his tea at the farm, and ride back by rail at the gentleman's expense, the tale seemed fictitious to Lætitia until Crossjay related how that he had stood to salute on the road to the railway, and taken off his cap to Sir Willoughby, and Sir Willoughby had passed him, not noticing him, though the young lady did, and looked back and nodded. The hue of truth was in that picture.

Strange eclipse, when the hue of truth comes shadowing over our bright ideal planet. It will not seem the planet's fault, but truth's. Reality is the offender; delusion our treasure that we are robbed of. Then begins with us the term of wilful delusion, and its necessary accompaniment of the disgust of reality; exhausting the heart much more than patient endurance of starvation.

Hints were dropping about the neighbourhood; the hedgeways twittered, the tree-tops cawed. Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson was loud on the subject: 'Patterne is to have a mistress at last, you say? But there never was a doubt of his marrying—he must marry; and, so long as he does not marry a foreign woman, we have no cause to complain. He

Digitized by Google

met her at Cherriton. Both were struck at the same moment. Her father is, I hear, some sort of learned man; money; no land. No house either, I believe. People who spend half their time on the Continent. They are now for a year at Upton Park. The very girl to settle down and entertain when she does think of settling. Eighteen, perfect manners; you need not ask if a beauty. Sir Willoughby will have his dues. We must teach her to make amends to him—but don't listen to Lady Busshe! He was too young at twenty-three or twenty-four. No young man is ever jilted; he is allowed to escape. A young man married is a fire-eater bound over to keep the peace; if he keeps it he worries it. At thirty-one or thirty-two he is ripe for his command, because he knows how to bend. And Sir Willoughby is a splendid creature, only wanting a wife to complete him. For a man like that to go on running about would never do. Soberly—no! It would soon be getting ridiculous. He has been no worse than other men, probably better—infinitely more excuseable; but now we have him, and it was time we should. I shall see her and study her, sharply, you may be sure; though I fancy I can rely on his judgement.'

In confirmation of the swelling buzz, the Rev. Dr. Middleton and his daughter paid a flying visit to the Hall, where they were seen only by the members of the Patterne family. Young Crossjay had a short conversation with Miss Middleton, and ran to the cottage full of her—she loved the navy and had a merry face. She had a smile of very pleasant humour, according to Vernon. The young lady was outlined to Lætitia as tall, elegant, lively; and painted as

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV
Lætitia Dale

carrying youth like a flag. With her smile of 'very pleasant humour,' she could not but be winning.

Vernon spoke more of her father, a scholar of high repute; happily, a scholar of an independent fortune. His maturer recollection of Miss Middleton grew poetic, or he described her in an image to suit a poetic ear: 'She gives you an idea of the Mountain Echo. Dr. Middleton has one of the grandest heads in England.'

'What is her Christian name?' said Lætitia.

He thought her Christian name was Clara.

Lætitia went to bed and walked through the day conceiving the Mountain Echo, the swift wild spirit, Clara by name, sent fleeting on a far half-circle by the voice it is roused to subserve; sweeter than beautiful, high above drawing-room beauties as the colours of the sky; and if, at the same time, elegant and of loveable smiling, could a man resist her? To inspire the title of Mountain Echo in any mind, a young lady must be singularly spiritualized. Her father doated on her, Vernon said. Who would not? It seemed an additional cruelty that the grace of a poetical attractiveness should be round her, for this was robbing Lætitia of some of her own little fortune, mystical though that might be. But a man like Sir Willoughby had claims on poetry, possessing as he did every manly grace; and to think that Miss Middleton had won him by virtue of something native to her likewise, though mystically, touched Lætitia with a faint sense of relationship to the chosen girl. 'What is in me, he sees on her.' It decked her pride to think so, as a wreath on the gravestone. She encouraged her imagination to brood over Clara, and invested

Digitized by Google

her designedly with romantic charms, in spite of pain: the ascetic zealot hugs his share of heaven—most bitter, most blessed — in his hair shirt and scourge, and Lætitia's happiness was to glorify Clara. Through that chosen rival, through her comprehension of the spirit of Sir Willoughby's choice of one such as Clara, she was linked to him yet.

Her mood of ecstatic fidelity was a dangerous exaltation: one that in a desert will distort the brain, and in the world where the idol dwells will put him, should he come nigh, to its own furnace-test, and get a clear brain out of a burnt heart. She was frequently at the Hall, helping to nurse Lady Patterne. Sir Willoughby had hitherto treated her as a dear insignificant friend, to whom it was unnecessary that he should mention the object of his rides to Upton Park.

He had, however, in the contemplation of what he was gaining, fallen into anxiety about what he might be losing. She belonged to his brilliant youth; her devotion was the bride of his youth; he was a man who lived backwards almost as intensely as in the present; and, notwithstanding Lætitia's praiseworthy zeal in attending on his mother, he suspected some unfaithfulness: hardly without cause: she had not looked paler of late, her eyes had not reproached him; the secret of the old days between them had been as little concealed as it was exposed. She might have buried it, after the way of women, whose bosoms can be tombs, if we and the world allow them to be; absolutely sepulchres, where you lie dead, ghastly. Even if not dead and horrible to think of, you may be lying cold, somewhere in a corner. Even if

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV
Lætitia Dale

embalmed, you may not be much visited. And how is the world to know you are embalmed? You are no better than a rotting wretch to the world that does not have peeps of you in the woman's breast, and see lights burning and an occasional exhibition of the services of worship. There are women—tell us not of her of Ephesus!—that have embalmed you, and have quitted the world to keep the tapers alight, and a stranger comes, and they, who have your image before them, will suddenly blow out the vestal flames and treat you as dust to fatten the garden of their bosoms for a fresh flower of love. Sir Willoughby knew it; he had experience of it in the form of the stranger; and he knew the stranger's feelings toward his predecessor and the lady.

He waylaid Lætitia, to talk of himself and his plans: the project of a run to Italy. Enviable? Yes, but in England you live the higher moral life. Italy boasts of sensual beauty; the spiritual is yours. 'I know Italy well; I have often wished to act as cicerone to you there. As it is, I suppose I shall be with those who know the land as well as I do, and will not be particularly enthusiastic: . . . if you are what you were?' He was guilty of this perplexing twist from one person to another in a sentence more than once. While he talked exclusively of himself, it seemed to her a condescension. In time he talked principally of her, beginning with her admirable care of his mother; and he wished to introduce 'a Miss Middleton' to her; he wanted her opinion of Miss Middleton; he relied on her intuition of character, had never known it err.

'If I supposed it could err, Miss Dale, I should not

Digitized by Google

be so certain of myself. I am bound up in my good opinion of you, you see; and you must continue the same, or where shall I be?' Thus he was led to dwell upon friendship, and the charm of the friendship of men and women, 'Platonism,' as it was called. 'I have laughed at it in the world, but not in the depth of my heart. The world's platonic attachments are laughable enough. You have taught me that the ideal of friendship *is* possible—when we find two who are capable of a disinterested esteem. The rest of life is duty; duty to parents, duty to country. But friendship is the holiday of those who can be friends. Wives are plentiful, friends are rare. I know *how* rare!'

Lætitia swallowed her thoughts as they sprang up. Why was he torturing her?—to give himself a holiday? She could bear to lose him—she was used to it—and bear his indifference, but not that he should disfigure himself; it made her poor. It was as if he required an oath of her when he said: 'Italy! But I shall never see a day in Italy to compare with the day of my return to England, or know a pleasure so exquisite as your welcome of me! Will you be true to that? May I look forward to just another such meeting?'

He pressed her for an answer. She gave the best she could. He was dissatisfied, and to her hearing it was hardly in the tone of manliness that he entreated her to reassure him; he womanized his language. She had to say: 'I am afraid I cannot undertake to make it an appointment, Sir Willoughby,' before he recovered his alertness, which he did, for he was anything but obtuse, with the reply,

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV
Lætitia Dale

'You would keep it if you promised, and freeze at your post. So, as accidents happen, we must leave it to fate. The will's the thing. You know my detestation of changes. At least I have you for my tenant, and wherever I am, I see your light at the end of my park.'

'Neither my father nor I would willingly quit Ivy Cottage,' said Lætitia.

'So far, then'; he murmured. 'You will give me a long notice, and it must be with my consent if you think of quitting?'

'I could almost engage to do that,' she said.

'You love the place?'

'Yes; I am the most contented of cottagers.'

'I believe, Miss Dale, it would be well for my happiness were I a cottager.'

'That is the dream of the palace. But to be one, and not to wish to be other, is quiet sleep in comparison.'

'You paint a cottage in colours that tempt one to run from big houses and households.'

'You would run back to them faster, Sir Willoughby.'

'You may know me,' said he, bowing and passing on contentedly. He stopped: 'But I am not ambitious.'

'Perhaps you are too proud for ambition, Sir Willoughby.'

'You hit me to the life!'

He passed on regretfully. Clara Middleton did not study and know him like Lætitia Dale.

Lætitia was left to think it pleased him to play at cat and mouse. She had not 'hit him to the life,' or she would have marvelled in acknowledging how sincere he was.

Digitized by Google

At her next sitting by the bedside of Lady Patterne, she received a certain measure of insight that might have helped her to fathom him, if only she could have kept her feelings down. The old lady was affectionately confidential in talking of her one subject, her son. 'And here is another dashing girl, my dear; she has money and health and beauty; and so has he; and it appears a fortunate union; I hope and pray it may be; but we begin to read the world when our eyes grow dim, because we read the plain lines, and I ask myself whether money and health and beauty on both sides, have not been the mutual attraction. We tried it before; and that girl Durham was honest, whatever we may call her. I should have desired an appreciative, thoughtful partner for him, a woman of mind, with another sort of wealth and beauty. She was honest, she ran away in time; there was a worse thing possible than that. And now we have the same chapter, and the same kind of person, who may not be quite as honest; and I shall not see the end of it. Promise me you will always be good to him; be my son's friend; his Egeria, he names you. Be what you were to him when that girl broke his heart, and no one, not even his mother, was allowed to see that he suffered anything. Comfort him in his sensitiveness. Willoughby has the most entire faith in you. Were that destroyed—I shudder! You are, he says, and he has often said, his image of the constant woman. . . .'

Lætitia's hearing took in no more. She repeated to herself for days: 'His image of the constant woman!' Now, when he was a second time forsaking her, his praise of her constancy wore the painful ludicrousness of the look of a whimper on the face.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V

Clara Middleton

The great meeting of Sir Willoughby Patterne and Miss Middleton had taken place at Cherriton Grange, the seat of a county grandee, where this young lady of eighteen was first seen rising above the horizon. She had money and health and beauty, the triune of perfect starriness, which makes all men astronomers. He looked on her, expecting her to look at him. But as soon as he looked he found that he must be in motion to win a look in return. He was one of a pack; many were ahead of him, the whole of them were eager. He had to debate within himself how best to communicate to her that he was Willoughby Patterne, before her gloves were too much soiled to flatter his niceness, for here and there, all around, she was yielding her hand to partners—obscurant males whose touch leaves a stain. Far too generally gracious was Her Starriness to please him. The effect of it, nevertheless, was to hurry him with all his might into the heat of the chase, while yet he knew no more of her than that he was competing for a prize and Willoughby Patterne only one of dozens to the young lady.

A deeper student of Science than his rivals, he appreciated Nature's compliment in the fair one's choice of you. We now scientifically know that in this department of the universal struggle, success is awarded to the bettermost. You spread a handsomer tail than your fellows, you dress a finer top-knot, you pipe a newer note, have a longer stride; she reviews

Digitized by Google

you in competition, and selects you. The superlative is magnetic to her. She may be looking elsewhere, and you will see—the superlative will simply have to beckon, away she glides. She cannot help herself; it is her nature, and her nature is the guarantee for the noblest race of men to come of her. In complimenting you, she is a promise of superior offspring. Science thus—or it is better to say, an acquaintance with science facilitates the cultivation of aristocracy. Consequently a successful pursuit and a wresting of her from a body of competitors, tells you that you are the best man. What is more, it tells the world so.

Willoughby aired his amiable superlatives in the eye of Miss Middleton; he had a leg. He was the heir of successful competitors. He had a style, a tone, an artist tailor, an authority of manner: he had in the hopeful ardour of the chase among a multitude a freshness that gave him advantage; and together with his undeviating energy when there was a prize to be won and possessed, these were scarcely resistible. He spared no pains, for he was adust and athirst for the winning-post. He courted her father, aware that men likewise, and parents pre-eminently, have their preference for the larger offer, the deeper pocket, the broader lands, the respectfuller consideration. Men, after their fashion, as well as women, distinguish the bettermost, and aid him to succeed, as Dr. Middleton certainly did in the crisis of the memorable question proposed to his daughter within a month of Willoughby's reception at Upton Park. The young lady was astonished at his whirlwind wooing of her, and bent to it like a sapling. She begged for time; Willoughby could barely wait. She unhesitatingly owned that she liked no one better,

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V
Clara Middleton

and he consented. A calm examination of his position told him that it was unfair so long as he stood engaged and she did not. She pleaded a desire to see a little of the world before she plighted herself. She alarmed him; he assumed the amazing God of Love under the subtlest guise of the divinity. Willingly would he obey her behests, resignedly languish, were it not for his mother's desire to see the future lady of Patterne established there before she died. Love shone cunningly through the mask of filial duty, but the plea of urgency was reasonable. Dr. Middleton thought it reasonable, supposing his daughter to have an inclination. She had no disinclination, though she had a maidenly desire to see a little of the world—grace for one year, she said. Willoughby reduced the year to six months, and granted that term, for which, in gratitude, she submitted to stand engaged; and that was no light whispering of a word. She was implored to enter the state of captivity by the pronunciation of vows—a private but a binding ceremonial. She had health and beauty, and money to gild these gifts: not that he stipulated for money with his bride, but it adds a lustre to dazzle the world; and, moreover, the pack of rival pursuers hung close behind, yelping and raising their dolorous throats to the moon. Captive she must be.

He made her engagement no light whispering matter. It was a solemn plighting of a troth. Why not? Having said, I am yours, she could say, I am wholly yours, I am yours for ever, I swear it, I will never swerve from it, I am your wife in heart, yours utterly; our engagement is written above. To this she considerately appended, 'as far as I am concerned'; a

Digitized by Google

piece of somewhat chilling generosity, and he forced her to pass him through love's catechism in turn, and came out with fervent answers that bound him to her too indissolubly to let her doubt of her being loved. And I am loved! she exclaimed to her heart's echoes, in simple faith and wonderment. Hardly had she begun to think of love ere the apparition arose in her path. She had not thought of love with any warmth, and here it was. She had only dreamed of love as one of the distant blessings of the mighty world, lying somewhere in the world's forests, across wild seas, veiled, encompassed with beautiful perils, a throbbing secresy, but too remote to quicken her bosom's throbs. Her chief idea of it was, the enrichment of the world by love.

Thus did Miss Middleton acquiesce in the principle of selection.

And then did the best man of a host blow his triumphant horn, and loudly.

He looked the fittest; he justified the dictum of Science. The survival of the Patternes was assured. 'I would,' he said to his admirer, Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, 'have bargained for health above everything, but she has everything besides—lineage, beauty, breeding: is what they call an heiress, and is the most accomplished of her sex.' With a delicate art he conveyed to the lady's understanding that Miss Middleton had been snatched from a crowd, without a breath of the crowd having offended his niceness. He did it through sarcasm at your modern young women, who run about the world nibbling and nibbled at, until they know one sex as well as the other, and are not a whit less cognizant of the market than men:

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V
Clara Middleton

pure, possibly; it is not so easy to say innocent; decidedly not our feminine ideal. Miss Middleton was different: she was the true ideal, fresh-gathered morning fruit in a basket, warranted by her bloom.

Women do not defend their younger sisters for doing what they perhaps have done—lifting a veil to be seen, and peeping at a world where innocence is as poor a guarantee as a babe's caul against shipwreck. Women of the world never think of attacking the sensual stipulation for perfect bloom, silver purity, which is redolent of the Oriental origin of the love-passion of their lords. Mrs. Mountstuart congratulated Sir Willoughby on the prize he had won in the fair western-eastern.

'Let me see her,' she said; and Miss Middleton was introduced and critically observed.

She had the mouth that smiles in repose. The lips met full on the centre of the bow and thinned along to a lifting dimple; the eyelids also lifted slightly at the outer corners and seemed, like the lip into the limpid cheek, quickening up the temples, as with a run of light, or the ascension indicated off a shoot of colour. Her features were playfellows of one another, none of them pretending to rigid correctness, nor the nose to the ordinary dignity of governess among merry girls, despite which the nose was of a fair design, not acutely interrogative or inviting to gambols. Aspens imaged in water, waiting for the breeze, would offer a susceptible lover some suggestion of her face: a pure smooth-white face, tenderly flushed in the cheeks, where the gentle dints were faintly intermelting even during quietness. Her eyes were brown, set well between mild lids, often shadowed, not un-

Digitized by Google

wakeful. Her hair of lighter brown, swelling above her temples on the sweep to the knot, imposed the triangle of the fabulous wild woodland visage from brow to mouth and chin, evidently in agreement with her taste; and the triangle suited her; but her face was not significant of a tameless wildness or of weakness; her equable shut mouth threw its long curve to guard the small round chin from that effect; her eyes wavered only in humour, they were steady when thoughtfulness was awakened; and at such seasons the build of her winter-beechwood hair lost the touch of nymph-like and whimsical, and strangely, by mere outline, added to her appearance of studious concentration. Observe the hawk on stretched wings over the prey he spies, for an idea of this change in the look of a young lady whom Vernon Whitford could liken to the Mountain Echo, and Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson pronounced to be 'a dainty rogue in porcelain.'

Vernon's fancy of her must have sprung from her prompt and most musical responsiveness. He preferred the society of her learned father to that of a girl under twenty engaged to his cousin, but the charm of her ready tongue and her voice was to his intelligent understanding wit, natural wit, crystal wit, as opposed to the paste-sparkle of the wit of the town. In his encomiums he did not quote Miss Middleton's wit; nevertheless he ventured to speak of it to Mrs. Mountstuart, causing that lady to say: 'Ah, well, I have not noticed the wit. You may have the art of drawing it out.'

No one had noticed the wit. The corrupted hearing of people required a collision of sounds, Vernon

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V Clara Middleton

supposed. For his part, to prove their excellence, he recollected a great many of Miss Middleton's remarks; they came flying to him; and as long as he forbore to speak them aloud, they had a curious wealth of meaning. It could not be all her manner, however much his own manner might spoil them. It might be, to a certain degree, her quickness at catching the hue and shade of evanescent conversation. Possibly by remembering the whole of a conversation wherein she had her place, the wit was to be tested; only how could any one retain the heavy portion? As there was no use in being argumentative on a subject affording him personally, and apparently solitarily, refreshment and enjoyment, Vernon resolved to keep it to himself. The eulogies of her beauty, a possession in which he did not consider her so very conspicuous, irritated him in consequence. To flatter Sir Willoughby, it was the fashion to exalt her as one of the types of beauty: the one providentially selected to set off his masculine type. She was compared to those delicate flowers, the ladies of the Court of China, on rice-paper. A little French dressing would make her at home on the sward by the fountain among the lutes and whisperers of the bewitching silken shepherdesses, who live though they never were. Lady Busshe was reminded of the favourite lineaments of the women of Leonardo, the angels of Luini. Lady Culmer had seen crayon sketches of demoiselles of the French aristocracy resembling her. Some one mentioned an antique statue of a figure breathing into a flute: and the mouth at the flute-stop might have a distant semblance of the bend of her mouth, but this comparison was repelled as grotesque.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V
Clara Middleton

For once Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson was unsuccessful. Her 'dainty rogue in porcelain' displeased Sir Willoughby. 'Why rogue?' he said. The lady's fame for hitting the mark fretted him, and the grace of his bride's fine bearing stood to support him in his objection. Clara was young, healthy, handsome; she was therefore fitted to be his wife, the mother of his children, his companion picture. Certainly they looked well side by side. In walking with her, in drooping to her, the whole man was made conscious of the female image of himself by her exquisite unlikeness. She completed him, added the softer lines wanting to his portrait before the world. He had wooed her rageingly; he courted her becomingly; with the manly self-possession enlivened by watchful tact which is pleasing to girls. He never seemed to undervalue himself in valuing her: a secret priceless in the courtship of young women that have heads; the lover doubles their sense of personal worth through not forfeiting his own. Those were proud and happy days when he rode Black Norman over to Upton Park, and his lady looked forth for him and knew him coming by the faster beating of her heart.

Her mind, too, was receptive. She took impressions of his characteristics, and supplied him a feast. She remembered his chance phrases; noted his ways, his peculiarities, as no one of her sex had done. He thanked his cousin Vernon for saying she had wit. She had it, and of so high a flavour that the more he thought of the epigram launched at her, the more he grew displeased. With the wit to understand him, and the heart to worship, she had a dignity rarely seen in young ladies.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V
Clara Middleton

'Why rogue?' he insisted with Mrs. Mountstuart.

'I said—in porcelain,' she replied.

'Rogue perplexes me.'

'Porcelain explains it.'

'She has the keenest sense of honour.'

'I am sure she is a paragon of rectitude.'

'She has a beautiful bearing.'

'The carriage of a young princess!'

'I find her perfect.'

'And still she may be a dainty rogue in porcelain.'

'Are you judging by the mind or the person, ma'am?'

'Both.'

'And which is which?'

'There's no distinction.'

'Rogue and mistress of Patterne do not go together.'

'Why not? She will be a novelty to our neighbourhood and an animation of the Hall.'

'To be frank, rogue does not rightly match with *me*.'

'Take her for a supplement.'

'You like her?'

'In love with her! I can imagine life-long amusement in her company. Attend to my advice: prize the porcelain and play with the rogue.'

Sir Willoughby nodded unilluminated. There was nothing of rogue in himself, so there could be nothing of it in his bride. Elfishness, tricksiness, freakishness, were antipathetic to his nature; and he argued that it was impossible he should have chosen for his complement a person deserving the title. It would not have been sanctioned by his guardian genius. His closer acquaintance with Miss Middleton squared with his first impressions; you know that this is convinc-

Digitized by Google

ing; the common jury justifies the presentation of the case to them by the grand jury; and his original conclusion, that she was essentially feminine, in other words, a parasite and a chalice, Clara's conduct confirmed from day to day. He began to instruct her in the knowledge of himself without reserve, and she, as she grew less timid with him, became more reflective.

'I judge by character,' he said to Mrs. Mountstuart.

'If you have caught the character of a girl,' said she.

'I think I am not far off it.'

'So it was thought by the man who dived for the moon in a well.'

'How women despise their sex!'

'Not a bit. She has no character yet. You are forming it, and pray be advised and be merry; the solid is your safest guide; physiognomy and manners will give you more of a girl's character than all the divings you can do. She is a charming young woman, only she is one of that sort.'

'Of what sort?' Sir Willoughby asked impatiently.

'Rogues in porcelain.'

'I am persuaded I shall never comprehend it!'

'I cannot help you one bit further.'

'The word rogue!'

'It was dainty rogue.'

'Brittle, would you say?'

'I am quite unable to say.'

'An innocent naughtiness?'

'Prettily moulded in a delicate substance.'

'You are thinking of some piece of Dresden you suppose her to resemble.'

'I daresay.'

'Artificial?'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V
Clara Middleton

'You would not have her natural?'

'I am heartily satisfied with her from head to foot, my dear Mrs. Mountstuart.'

'Nothing could be better. And sometimes she will lead, and generally you will lead, and everything will go well, my dear Sir Willoughby.'

Like all rapid phrasers, Mrs. Mountstuart detested the analysis of her sentence. It had an outline in vagueness, and was flung out to be apprehended, not dissected. Her directions for the reading of Miss Middleton's character were the same that she practised in reading Sir Willoughby's, whose physiognomy and manners bespoke him what she presumed him to be, a splendidly proud gentleman, with good reason.

Mrs. Mountstuart's advice was wiser than her procedure, for she stopped short where he declined to begin. He dived below the surface without studying that index-page. He had won Miss Middleton's hand; he believed he had captured her heart; but he was not so certain of his possession of her soul, and he went after it. Our enamoured gentleman had therefore no tally of Nature's writing above to set beside his discoveries in the deeps. Now it is a dangerous accompaniment of this habit of diving, that where we do not light on the discoveries we anticipate, we fall to work sowing and planting; which becomes a disturbance of the gentle bosom. Miss Middleton's features were legible as to the mainspring of her character. He could have seen that she had a spirit with a natural love of liberty, and required the next thing to liberty, spaciousness, if she was to own allegiance. Those features, unhappily, instead of serving for an introduction to the within, were treated as

Digitized by Google

the mirror of himself. They were indeed of an amiable sweetness to tempt an accepted lover to angle for the first person in the second. But he had made the discovery that their minds differed on one or two points, and a difference of view in his bride was obnoxious to his repose. He struck at it recurringly to show her error under various aspects. He desired to shape her character to the feminine of his own, and betrayed the surprise of a slight disappointment at her advocacy of her ideas. She said immediately: 'It is not too late, Willoughby,' and wounded him, for he wanted her simply to be material in his hands for him to mould her; he had no other thought. He lectured her on the theme of the infinity of love. How was it not too late? They were plighted; they were one eternally; they could not be parted. She listened gravely, conceiving the infinity as a narrow dwelling where a voice droned and ceased not. However, she listened. She became an attentive listener.

CHAPTER VI

His Courtship

The world was the principal topic of dissension between these lovers. His opinion of the world affected her like a creature threatened with a deprivation of air. He explained to his darling that lovers of necessity do loathe the world. They live in the world, they accept its benefits, and assist it as well as they can. In their hearts they must despise it, shut it out, that their love for one another may pour in a clear channel,

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI
His Courtship

and with all the force they have. They cannot enjoy the sense of security for their love unless they fence away the world. It is, you will allow, gross; it is a beast. Formally we thank it for the good we get of it; only we two have an inner temple where the worship we conduct is actually, if you would but see it, an excommunication of the world. We abhor that beast to adore that divinity. This gives us our oneness, our isolation, our happiness. This is to love with the soul. Do you see, darling?

She shook her head; she could not see it. She would admit none of the notorious errors of the world; its backbiting, selfishness, coarseness, intrusiveness, infectiousness. She was young. She might, Willoughby thought, have let herself be led: she was not docile. She must be up in arms as a champion of the world: and one saw she was hugging her dream of a romantic world, nothing else. She spoilt the secret bower-song he delighted to tell over to her. And how, Powers of Love! is love-making to be pursued if we may not kick the world out of our bower and wash our hands of it? Love that does not spurn the world when lovers curtain themselves is a love—is it not so?—that seems to the unwhipped scoffing world to go slinking into basiation's obscurity, instead of on a glorious march behind the screen. Our hero had a strong sentiment as to the policy of scorning the world for the sake of defending his personal pride and (to his honour, be it said) his lady's delicacy.

The act of scorning put them both above the world, said, retro Sathanas! So much, as a piece of tactics: he was highly civilized: in the second instance, he

Digitized by Google

knew it to be the world which must furnish the dry sticks for the bonfire of a woman's worship. He knew, too, that he was prescribing poetry to his betrothed, practicable poetry. She had a liking for poetry, and sometimes quoted the stuff in defiance of his pursed mouth and pained murmur: 'I am no poet'; but his poetry of the enclosed and fortified bower, without nonsensical rhymes to catch the ears of women, appeared incomprehensible to her, if not adverse. She would not burn the world for him; she would not, though a purer poetry is little imaginable, reduce herself to ashes, or incense, or essence, in honour of him, and so, by love's transmutation, literally be the man she was to marry. She preferred to be herself, with the egoism of women! She said it: she said: 'I must be myself to be of any value to you, Willoughby.' He was indefatigable in his lectures on the æsthetics of love. Frequently, for an indemnification to her (he had no desire that she should be a loser by ceasing to admire the world), he dwelt on his own youthful ideas; and his original fancies about the world were presented to her as a substitute for the theme.

Miss Middleton bore it well, for she was sure that he meant well. Bearing so well what was distasteful to her, she became less well able to bear what she had merely noted in observation before: his view of scholarship; his manner toward Mr. Vernon Whitford, of whom her father spoke warmly; the rumour concerning his treatment of a Miss Dale. And the country tale of Constantia Durham sang itself to her in a new key. He had no contempt for the world's praises. Mr. Whitford wrote the letters to the county

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI
His Courtship

paper which gained him applause at various great houses, and he accepted it, and betrayed a tingling fright lest he should be the victim of a sneer of the world he contemned. Recollecting his remarks, her mind was afflicted by the 'something illogical' in him that we readily discover when our natures are no longer running free, and then at once we yearn for a disputation. She resolved that she would one day, one distant day, provoke it—upon what? The special point eluded her. The world is too huge a client, and too pervious, too spotty, for a girl to defend against a man. That 'something illogical' had stirred her feelings more than her intellect to revolt. She could not constitute herself the advocate of Mr. Whitford. Still she marked the disputation for an event to come.

Meditating on it, she fell to picturing Sir Willoughby's face at the first accents of his bride's decided disagreement with him. The picture once conjured up would not be laid. He was handsome; so correctly handsome, that a slight unfriendly touch precipitated him into caricature. His habitual air of happy pride, of indignant contentment rather, could easily be overdone. Surprise, when he threw emphasis on it, stretched him with the tall eyebrows of a mask—limitless under the spell of caricature; and in time, whenever she was not pleased by her thoughts, she had that, and not his likeness, for the vision of him. And it was unjust, contrary to her deeper feelings; she rebuked herself, and as much as her naughty spirit permitted, she tried to look on him as the world did; an effort inducing reflections upon the blessings of ignorance. She seemed

Digitized by Google

to herself beset by a circle of imps, hardly responsible for her thoughts.

He outshone Mr. Whitford in his behaviour to young Crossjay. She had seen him with the boy, and he was amused, indulgent, almost frolicsome, in contradistinction to Mr. Whitford's tutorly sharpness. He had the English father's tone of a liberal allowance for boys' tastes and pranks, and he ministered to the partiality of the genus for pocket-money. He did not play the schoolmaster, like bookworms who get poor little lads in their grasp.

Mr. Whitford avoided her very much. He came to Upton Park on a visit to her father, and she was not particularly sorry that she saw him only at table. He treated her by fits to a level scrutiny of deep-set eyes unpleasantly penetrating. She had liked his eyes. They became unbearable; they dwelt in the memory as if they had left a phosphorescent line. She had been taken by playmate boys in her infancy to peep into hedge-leaves, where the mother-bird brooded on the nest; and the eyes of the bird in that marvellous dark thickset home, had sent her away with worlds of fancy. Mr. Whitford's gaze revived her susceptibility, but not the old happy wondering. She was glad of his absence, after a certain hour that she passed with Willoughby, a wretched hour to remember. Mr. Whitford had left, and Willoughby came, bringing bad news of his mother's health. Lady Patterne was fast failing. Her son spoke of the loss she would be to him; he spoke of the dreadfulness of death. He alluded to his own death to come, carelessly, with a philosophical air.

'All of us must go! our time is short.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI
His Courtship

'Very,' she assented.

It sounded like want of feeling.

'If you lose me, Clara!'

'But you are strong, Willoughby.'

'I may be cut off to-morrow.'

'Do not talk in such a manner.'

'It is as well that it should be faced.'

'I cannot see what purpose it serves.'

'Should you lose me, my love!'

'Willoughby!'

'Oh, the bitter pang of leaving you!'

'Dear Willoughby, you are distressed; your mother may recover; let us hope she will; I will help to nurse her; I have offered, you know; I am ready, most anxious. I believe I am a good nurse.'

'It is this belief—that one does not die with death!'

'That is our comfort.'

'When we love?'

'Does it not promise that we meet again?'

'To walk the world and see you perhaps . . . with another!'

'See me?—Where? Here?'

'Wedded . . . to another. You! my bride; whom I call mine; and you are! You would be still—in that horror! But all things are possible; women are women; they swim in infidelity, from wave to wave! I know them.'

'Willoughby, do not torment yourself and me, I beg you.'

He meditated profoundly, and asked her: 'Could you be such a saint among women?'

'I think I am a more than usually childish girl.'

'Not to forget me?'

Digitized by Google

'Oh! no.'

'Still to be mine?'

'I am yours.'

'To plight yourself?'

'It is done.'

'Be mine beyond death?'

'Married is married, I think.'

'Clara! to dedicate your life to our love! Never one touch! not one whisper! not a thought, not a dream! Could you?—it agonizes me to imagine . . . be inviolate? mine above?—mine before all men, though I am gone:—true to my dust? Tell me. Give me that assurance. True to my name!—Oh! I hear them. "His relict." Buzzings about Lady Patterne. "The widow." If you knew their talk of widows! Shut your ears, my angel! But if she holds them off and keeps her path, they are forced to respect her. The dead husband is not the dishonoured wretch they fancied him, because he was out of their way. He lives in the heart of his wife. Clara! my Clara! as I live in yours, whether here or away; whether you are a wife or widow, there is no distinction for love—I am your husband—say it—eternally. I must have peace; I cannot endure the pain. Depressed, yes; I have cause to be. But it has haunted me ever since we joined hands. To have you—to lose you!'

'Is it not possible that I may be the first to die?' said Miss Middleton.

'And lose you, with the thought that you, lovely as you are, and the dogs of the world barking round you, might . . . Is it any wonder that I have my feeling for the world? This hand!—the thought is horrible. You would be surrounded; men are

Digitized by Google

brutes; the scent of unfaithfulness excites them, overjoys them. And I helpless! The thought is maddening. I see a ring of monkeys grinning. There is your beauty, and man's delight in desecrating. You would be worried night and day to quit my name, to . . . I feel the blow now. You would have no rest for them, nothing to cling to without your oath.'

'An oath!' said Miss Middleton.

'It is no delusion, my love, when I tell you that with this thought upon me I see a ring of monkey-faces grinning at me: they haunt me. But you do swear it! Once, and I will never trouble you on the subject again. My weakness! if you like. You will learn that it is love, a man's love, stronger than death.'

'An oath?' she said, and moved her lips to recall what she might have said and forgotten. 'To what? what oath?'

'That you will be true to me dead as well as living! Whisper it.'

'Willoughby, I shall be true to my vows at the altar.'

'To me! me!'

'It will be to you.'

'To my soul. No heaven can be for me—I see none, only torture, unless I have your word, Clara. I trust it. I will trust it implicitly. My confidence in you is absolute.'

'Then you need not be troubled.'

'It is for *you*, my love; that you may be armed and strong when I am not by to protect you.'

'Our views of the world are opposed, Willoughby.'

Digitized by Google

'Consent; gratify me; swear it. Say, "Beyond death." Whisper it. I ask for nothing more. Women think the husband's grave breaks the bond, cuts the tie, sets them loose. They wed the flesh—pah! What I call on you for is nobility: the transcendent nobility of faithfulness beyond death. "*His* widow!" let them say; a saint in widowhood.'

'My vows at the altar must suffice.'

'You will not? Clara!'

'I am plighted to you.'

'Not a word?—a simple promise? But you love me?'

'I have given you the best proof of it that I can.'

'Consider how utterly I place confidence in you.'

'I hope it is well placed.'

'I could kneel to you, to worship you, if you would, Clara!'

'Kneel to heaven, not to me, Willoughby. I am . . . I wish I were able to tell what I am. I may be inconstant: I do not know myself. Think; question yourself whether I am really the person you should marry. Your wife should have great qualities of mind and soul. I will consent to hear that I do not possess them, and abide by the verdict.'

'You do; you do possess them!' Willoughby cried. 'When you know better what the world is, you will understand my anxiety. Alive, I am strong to shield you from it; dead, helpless—that is all. You would be clad in mail, steel-proof, inviolable, if you would . . . But try to enter into my mind; think with me, feel with me. When you have once comprehended the intensity of the love of a man like me, you will

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI
His Courtship

not require asking. It is the difference of the elect and the vulgar; of the ideal of love from the coupling of the herds. We will let it drop. At least, I have your hand. As long as I live I have your hand. Ought I not to be satisfied? I am; only, I see farther than most men, and feel more deeply. And now I must ride to my mother's bedside. She dies Lady Patterne! It might have been that she . . . but she is a woman of women! With a father-in-law! Just heaven! Could I have stood by her then with the same feelings of reverence? A very little, my love, and everything gained for us by civilization crumbles; we fall back to the first mortar-bowl we were bruised and stirred in. My thoughts, when I take my stand to watch by her, come to this conclusion, that, especially in women, distinction is the thing to be aimed at. Otherwise we are a welter-ing human mass. Women must teach us to venerate them, or we may as well be bleating and barking and bellowing. So, now enough. You have but to think a little. I must be off. It may have happened during my absence. I will write. I shall hear from you? Come and see me mount Black Norman. My respects to your father. I have no time to pay them in person. One!'

He took the one—love's mystical number—from which commonly spring multitudes; but, on the present occasion, it was a single one, and cold. She watched him riding away on his gallant horse, as handsome a cavalier as the world could show, and the contrast of his recent language and his fine figure was a riddle that froze her blood. Speech so foreign to her ears, unnatural in tone, unmanlike even for a

Digitized by Google

lover (who is allowed a softer dialect) set her vainly sounding for the source and drift of it. She was glad of not having to encounter eyes like Mr. Vernon Whitford's.

On behalf of Sir Willoughby, it is to be said that his mother, without infringing on the degree of respect for his decisions and sentiments exacted by him, had talked to him of Miss Middleton, suggesting a volatility of temperament in the young lady, that struck him as consentaneous with Mrs. Mountstuart's 'rogue in porcelain,' and alarmed him as the independent observations of two world-wise women. Nor was it incumbent upon him personally to credit the volatility in order, as far as he could, to effect the soul-insurance of his bride, that he might hold the security of the policy. The desire for it was in him; his mother had merely tolled a warning bell that he had put in motion before. Clara was not a Constantia. But she was a woman, and he had been deceived by women, as a man fostering his high ideal of them will surely be. The strain he adopted was quite natural to his passion and his theme. The language of the primitive sentiments of men is of the same expression at all times, minus the primitive colours when a modern gentleman addresses his lady.

Lady Patterne died in the Winter season of the new year. In April Dr. Middleton had to quit Upton Park, and he had not found a place of residence, nor did he quite know what to do with himself in the prospect of his daughter's marriage and desertion of him. Sir Willoughby proposed to find him a house within a circuit of the neighbourhood of Patterne. Moreover, he invited the Rev. Doctor and his daughter to come

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI
His Courtship

to Patterne from Upton for a month, and make acquaintance with his aunts, the ladies Eleanor and Isabel Patterne, so that it might not be so strange to Clara to have them as her housemates after her marriage. Dr. Middleton omitted to consult his daughter before accepting the invitation, and it appeared, when he did speak to her, that it should have been done. But she said mildly: 'Very well, papa.'

Sir Willoughby had to visit the metropolis and an estate in another county, whence he wrote to his betrothed daily. He returned to Patterne in time to arrange for the welcome of his guests; too late, however, to ride over to them; and, meanwhile, during his absence, Miss Middleton had bethought herself that she ought to have given her last days of freedom to her friends. After the weeks to be passed at Patterne, very few weeks were left to her, and she had a wish to run to Switzerland or Tyrol and see the Alps; a quaint idea, her father thought. She repeated it seriously, and Dr. Middleton perceived a feminine shuttle of indecision at work in her head, frightful to him, considering that they signified hesitation between the excellent library and capital wine-cellar of Patterne Hall, together with the society of that promising young scholar Mr. Vernon Whitford, on the one side, and a career of hotels—equivalent to being rammed into monster artillery with a crowd every night, and shot off on a day's journey through space every morning—on the other.

'You will have your travelling and your Alps after the ceremony,' he said.

'I think I would rather stay at home,' said she.

Dr. Middleton rejoined: '*I* would.'

Digitized by Google

'But I am not married yet, papa.'

'As good, my dear.'

'A little change of scene, I thought . . .'

'We have accepted Willoughby's invitation. And he helps me to a house near you.'

'You wish to be near me, papa?'

'Proximate—at a remove: communicable.'

'Why should we separate?'

'For the reason, my dear, that you exchange a father for a husband.'

'If I do not want to exchange?'

'To purchase, you must pay, my child. Husbands are not given for nothing.'

'No. But I should have you, papa!'

'Should?'

'They have not yet parted us, dear papa.'

'What does that mean?' he asked fussily. He was in a gentle stew already, apprehensive of a disturbance of the serenity precious to scholars by postponements of the ceremony, and a prolongation of a father's worries.

'Oh, the common meaning, papa,' she said, seeing how it was with him.

'Ah,' said he, nodding and blinking gradually back to a state of composure, glad to be appeased on any terms; for mutability is but another name for the sex, and it is the enemy of the scholar.

She suggested that two weeks at Patterne would offer plenty of time to inspect the empty houses of the district, and should be sufficient, considering the claims of friends, and the necessity for going the round of London shops.

'Two or three weeks,' he agreed hurriedly, by way of compromise with that fearful prospect.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII

The Betrothed

During the drive from Upton to Patterne, Miss Middleton hoped, she partly believed, that there was to be a change in Sir Willoughby's manner of courtship. He had been so different a wooer. She remembered with some half-conscious desperation of fervour what she had thought of him at his first approaches, and in accepting him. Had she seen him with the eyes of the world, thinking they were her own? That look of his, the look of 'indignant contentment,' had then been a most noble conquering look, splendid as a general's plume at the galiop. It could not have altered. Was it that her eyes had altered?

The spirit of those days rose up within her to reproach her and whisper of their renewal: she remembered her rosy dreams and the image she had of him, her throbbing pride in him, her choking richness of happiness: and also her vain attempting to be very humble, usually ending in a carol, quaint to think of, not without charm, but quaint, puzzling.

Now men whose incomes have been restricted to the extent that they must live on their capital, soon grow relieved of the forethoughtful anguish wasting them by the hilarious comforts of the lap upon which they have sunk back, insomuch that they are apt to solace themselves for their intolerable anticipations of famine in the household by giving loose to one fit or more of reckless lavishness. Lovers in like

Digitized by Google

manner live on their capital from failure of income: they, too, for the sake of stifling apprehension and piping to the present hour, are lavish of their stock, so as rapidly to attenuate it: they have their fits of intoxication in view of coming famine: they force memory into play, love retrospectively, enter the old house of the past and ravage the larder, and would gladly, even resolutely, continue in illusion if it were possible for the broadest honey-store of reminiscences to hold out for a length of time against a mortal appetite: which in good sooth stands on the alternative of a consumption of the hive or of the creature it is for nourishing. Here do lovers show that they are perishable. More than the poor clay world they need fresh supplies, right wholesome juices; as it were, life in the burst of the bud, fruits yet on the tree, rather than potted provender. The latter is excellent for by-and-by, when there will be a vast deal more to remember, and appetite shall have but one tooth remaining. Should their minds perchance have been saturated by their first impressions and have retained them, loving by the accountable light of reason, they may have fair harvests, as in the early time; but that case is rare. In other words, love is an affair of two, and is only for two that can be as quick, as constant in intercommunication as are sun and earth, through the cloud or face to face. They take their breath of life from one another in signs of affection, proofs of faithfulness, incentives to admiration. Thus it is with men and women in love's good season. But a solitary soul dragging a log, must make the log a God to rejoice in the burden. That is not love.

Clara was the least fitted of all women to drag a log.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII
The Betrothed

Few girls would be so rapid in exhausting capital. She was feminine indeed, but she wanted comradeship, a living and frank exchange of the best in both, with the deeper feelings untroubled. To be fixed at the mouth of a mine, and to have to descend it daily, and not to discover great opulence below; on the contrary, to be chilled in subterranean sunlessness, without any substantial quality that she could grasp, only the mystery of inefficient tallow-light in those caverns of the complacent talking man: this appeared to her too extreme a probation for two or three weeks. How of a lifetime of it!

She was compelled by her nature to hope, expect, and believe that Sir Willoughby would again be the man she had known when she accepted him. Very singularly, to show her simple spirit at the time, she was unaware of any physical coldness to him; she knew of nothing but her mind at work, objecting to this and that, desiring changes. She did not dream of being on the giddy ridge of the passive or negative sentiment of love, where one step to the wrong side precipitates us into the state of repulsion.

Her eyes were lively at their meeting—so were his. She liked to see him on the steps, with young Crossjay under his arm. Sir Willoughby told her in his pleasantest humour of the boy's having got into the laboratory that morning to escape his taskmaster, and blown out the windows. She administered a chiding to the delinquent in the same spirit, while Sir Willoughby led her on his arm across the threshold, whispering, 'Soon for good!' In reply to the whisper, she begged for more of the story of young Crossjay. 'Come into the laboratory,' said he, a little less

Digitized by Google

laughingly than softly; and Clara begged her father to come and see young Crossjay's latest pranks. Sir Willoughby whispered to her of the length of their separation and his joy to welcome her to the house where she would reign as mistress *very* soon. He numbered the weeks. He whispered, 'Come.' In the hurry of the moment she did not examine a lightning terror that shot through her. It passed, and was no more than the shadow which bends the summer grasses, leaving a ruffle of her ideas, in wonder of her having feared herself for something. Her father was with them. She and Willoughby were not yet alone.

Young Crossjay had not accomplished so fine a piece of destruction as Sir Willoughby's humour proclaimed of him. He had connected a battery with a train of gunpowder, shattering a window-frame and unsettling some bricks. Dr. Middleton asked if the youth was excluded from the library, and rejoiced to hear that it was a sealed door to him. Thither they went. Vernon Whitford was away on one of his long walks.

'There, papa, you see he is not so very faithful to you,' said Clara.

Dr. Middleton stood frowning over MS. notes on the table, in Vernon's handwriting. He flung up the hair from his forehead and dropped into a seat to inspect them closely. He was now immoveable. Clara was obliged to leave him there. She was led to think that Willoughby had drawn them to the library with the design to be rid of her protector, and she began to fear him. She proposed to pay her respects to the ladies Eleanor and Isabel. They were not seen, and a footman reported in the drawing-room

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII
The Betrothed

that they were out driving. She grasped young Crossjay's hand. Sir Willoughby despatched him to Mrs. Montague, the housekeeper, for a tea of cakes and jam.

'Off!' he said, and the boy had to run.

Clara saw herself without a shield.

'And the garden!' she cried. 'I love the garden; I must go and see what flowers are up with you. In Spring I care most for wild flowers, and if you will show me daffodils, and crocuses, and anemones . . .'

'My dearest Clara! my bride!' said he.

'Because they are vulgar flowers?' she asked him artlessly, to account for his detaining her.

Why would he not wait to deserve her!—no, not deserve—to reconcile her with her real position; not reconcile, but to repair the image of him in her mind, before he claimed his apparent right!

He did not wait. He pressed her to his bosom.

'You are mine, my Clara—utterly mine; every thought, every feeling. We are one: the world may do its worst. I have been longing for you, looking forward. You save me from a thousand vexations. One is perpetually crossed. That is all outside us. We two! With you I am secure! Soon! I could not tell you whether the world's alive or dead. My dearest!'

She came out of it with the sensations of the frightened child that has had its dip in sea-water, sharpened to think that after all it was not so severe a trial. Such was her idea; and she said to herself immediately: What am I that I should complain? Two minutes earlier she would not have thought it; but humiliated pride falls lower than humbleness.

Digitized by Google

She did not blame him; she fell in her own esteem; less because she was the betrothed Clara Middleton, which was now palpable as a shot in the breast of a bird, than that she was a captured woman, of whom it is absolutely expected that she must submit, and when she would rather be gazing at flowers. Clara had shame of her sex. They cannot take a step without becoming bondwomen; into what a slavery! For herself, her trial was over, she thought. As for herself, she merely complained of a prematureness and crudity best unanalyzed. In truth, she could hardly be said to complain. She did but criticize him and wonder that a man was unable to perceive, or was not arrested by perceiving, unwillingness, discordance, dull compliance; the bondwoman's due instead of the bride's consent. Oh, sharp distinction, as between two spheres!

She meted him justice; she admitted that he had spoken in a lover-like tone. Had it not been for the iteration of 'the world,' she would not have objected critically to his words, though they were words of downright appropriation. He had the right to use them, since she was to be married to him. But if he had only waited before playing the privileged lover!

Sir Willoughby was enraptured with her. Even so purely coldly, statue-like, Dian-like, would he have prescribed his bride's reception of his caress. The suffusion of crimson coming over her subsequently, showing her divinely feminine in reflective bashfulness, agreed with his highest definitions of female character.

'Let me conduct you to the garden, my love,' he said.

She replied, 'I think I would rather go to my room.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII
The Betrothed

'I will send you a wild-flower posy.'

'Flowers, no; I do not like them to be gathered.'

'I will wait for you on the lawn.'

'My head is rather heavy.'

His deep concern and tenderness brought him close.

She assured him sparklingly that she was well: she was ready to accompany him to the garden and stroll over the park.

'Head*ache* it is not,' she said.

But she had to pay the fee for inviting a solicitous accepted gentleman's proximity.

This time she blamed herself and him, and the world he abused, and destiny into the bargain. And she cared less about the probation; but she craved for liberty. With a frigidity that astonished her, she marvelled at the act of kissing, and at the obligation it forced upon an inanimate person to be an accomplice. Why was she not free? By what strange right was it that she was treated as a possession?

'I will try to walk off the heaviness,' she said.

'My own girl must not fatigue herself.'

'Oh, no; I shall not.'

'Sit with me. Your Willoughby is your devoted attendant.'

'I have a desire for the air.'

'Then we will walk out.'

She was horrified to think how far she had drawn away from him, and now placed her hand on his arm to appease her self-accusations and propitiate duty. He spoke as she had wished; his manner was what she had wished; she was his bride, almost his wife; her conduct was a kind of madness; she could not understand it.

Digitized by Google

Good sense and duty counselled her to control her wayward spirit.

He fondled her hand, and to that she grew accustomed; her hand was at a distance. And what is a hand? Leaving it where it was, she treated it as a link between herself and dutiful goodness. Two months hence she was a bondwoman for life! She regretted that she had not gone to her room to strengthen herself with a review of her situation, and meet him thoroughly resigned to her fate. She fancied she would have come down to him amicably. It was his present respectfulness and easy conversation that tricked her burning nerves with the fancy. Five weeks of perfect liberty in the mountains, she thought, would have prepared her for the day of bells. All that she required was a separation offering new scenes, where she might reflect undisturbed, feel clear again.

He led her about the flower-beds; too much as if he were giving a convalescent an airing. She chafed at it, and pricked herself with remorse. In contrition she expatiated on the beauty of the garden.

'All is yours, my Clara.'

An oppressive load it seemed to her! She passively yielded to the man in his form of attentive courtier; his mansion, estates, and wealth overwhelmed her. They suggested the price to be paid. Yet she recollected that on her last departure through the park she had been proud of the rolling green and spreading trees. Poison of some sort must be operating in her. She had not come to him to-day with this feeling of sullen antagonism; she had caught it here.

'You have been well, my Clara?'

Digitized by Google

'Quite.'

'Not a hint of illness?'

'None.'

'My bride must have her health if all the doctors in the kingdom die for it! My darling!'

'And tell me: the dogs?'

'Dogs and horses are in very good condition.'

'I am glad. Do you know, I love those ancient French châteaux and farms in one, where salon windows look on poultry-yard and stalls. I like that homeliness with beasts and peasants.'

He bowed indulgently.

'I am afraid we can't do it for you in England, my Clara.'

'No.'

'And I like the farm,' said he. 'But I think our drawing-rooms have a better atmosphere off the garden. As to our peasantry, we cannot, I apprehend, modify our class demarcations without risk of disintegrating the social structure.'

'Perhaps. I proposed nothing.'

'My love, I would entreat you to propose, if I were convinced that I could obey.'

'You are very good.'

'I find my merit nowhere but in your satisfaction.'

Although she was not thirsting for dulcet sayings, the peacefulness of other than invitations to the exposition of his mysteries and of their isolation in oneness, inspired her with such calm that she beat about in her brain, as if it were in the brain, for the specific injury he had committed. Sweeping from sensation to sensation, the young, whom sensations impel and distract, can rarely date their disturbance from a

Digitized by Google

particular one; unless it be some great villain injury that has been done: and Clara had not felt an individual shame in his caress; the shame of her sex was but a passing protest that left no stamp. So she conceived she had been behaving cruelly, and said: 'Willoughby'; because she was aware of the omission of his name in her previous remarks.

His whole attention was given to her.

She had to invent the sequel: 'I was going to beg you, Willoughby, do not seek to spoil me. You compliment me. Compliments are not suited to me. You think too highly of me. It is nearly as bad as to be slighted. I am . . . I am a . . .' But she could not follow his example: even as far as she had gone, her prim little sketch of herself, set beside her real, ugly, earnest feelings, rang of a mincing simplicity, and was a step in falseness. How could she display what she was?

'Do I not know you?' he said.

The melodious bass notes, expressive of conviction on that point, signified as well as the words that no answer was the right answer. She could not dissent without turning his music to discord, his complacency to amazement. She held her tongue, knowing that he did not know her, and speculating on the division made bare by their degrees of the knowledge; a deep cleft.

He alluded to friends in her neighbourhood and his own. The bridesmaids were mentioned.

'Miss Dale, you will hear from my aunt Eleanor, declines, on the plea of indifferent health. She is rather a morbid person, with all her really estimable qualities. It will do no harm to have none but young ladies of your own age; a bouquet of young buds:

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII
The Betrothed

though one blowing flower among them . . . However, she has decided. My principal annoyance has been Vernon's refusal to act as my best man.'

'Mr. Whitford refuses?'

'He half refuses. I do not take no from him. His pretext is a dislike to the ceremony.'

'I share it with him.'

'I sympathize with you. If we might say the words and pass from sight! There is a way of cutting off the world: I have it at times completely: I lose it again, as if it were a cabalistic phrase one had to utter. But with you! You give it me for good. It will be for ever, eternally, my Clara. Nothing can harm, nothing touch us; we are one another's. Let the world fight it out: we have nothing to do with it.'

'If Mr. Whitford should persist in refusing?'

'So entirely one, that there never can be question of external influences. I am, we will say, riding home from the hunt: I see you awaiting me: I read your heart as though you were beside me. And I know that I am coming to the one who reads mine! You have me, you have me like an open book, you, and only you!'

'I am to be always at home?' Clara said, unheeded, and relieved by his not hearing.

'Have you realized it?—that we are invulnerable! The world cannot hurt us: it cannot touch us. Felicity is ours, and we are impervious in the enjoyment of it. Something divine! surely something divine on earth? Clara!—being to one another that between which the world can never interpose! What I do is right: what you do is right. Perfect to one another! Each new day we rise to study and delight in new secrets. Away

Digitized by Google

with the crowd! We have not even to say it; we are in an atmosphere where the world cannot breathe.'

'O the world!' Clara partly carolled on a sigh that sank deep.

Hearing him talk as one exulting on the mountain top, when she knew him to be in the abyss, was very strange, provocative of scorn.

'My letters?' he said incitingly.

'I read them.'

'Circumstances have imposed a long courtship on us, my Clara: and I, perhaps lamenting the laws of decorum—I have done so!—still felt the benefit of the gradual initiation. It is not good for women to be surprised by a sudden revelation of man's character. We also have things to learn:—there is matter for learning everywhere. Some day you will tell me the difference of what you think of me now, from what you thought when we first . . .?'

An impulse of double-minded acquiescence caused Clara to stammer as on a sob:

'I—I daresay I shall.'

She added: 'If it is necessary.'

Then she cried out. 'Why do you attack the world? You always make me pity it.'

He smiled at her youthfulness. 'I have passed through that stage. It leads to my sentiment. Pity it, by all means.'

'No,' said she, 'but pity it, side with it, not consider it so bad. The world has faults; glaciers have crevasses, mountains have chasms; but is not the effect of the whole sublime? not to admire the mountain and the glacier because they can be cruel, seems to me . . . And the world is beautiful.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII
The Betrothed

'The world of nature, yes. The world of men?'

'Yes.'

'My love, I suspect you to be thinking of the world of ball-rooms.'

'I am thinking of the world that contains real and great generosity, true heroism. We see it round us.'

'We read of it. The world of the romance-writer!'

'No: the living world. I am sure it is our duty to love it. I am sure we weaken ourselves if we do not. If I did not, I should be looking on mist, hearing a perpetual boom instead of music. I remember hearing Mr. Whitford say that cynicism is intellectual dandyism without the coxcomb's feathers; and it seems to me that cynics are only happy in making the world as barren to others as they have made it for themselves.'

'Old Vernon!' ejaculated Sir Willoughby, with a countenance rather uneasy, as if it had been flicked with a glove. 'He strings his phrases by the dozen.'

'Papa contradicts that, and says he is very clever and very simple.'

'As to cynics, my dear Clara, oh! certainly, certainly: you are right. They are laughable, contemptible. But understand me, I mean, we cannot feel, or if we feel we cannot so intensely feel, our oneness, except by dividing ourselves from the world.'

'Is it an art?'

'If you like. It is our poetry! But does not love shun the world? Two that love must have their substance in isolation.'

'No: they will be eating themselves up.'

Digitized by Google

'The purer the beauty, the more it will be out of the world.'

'But not opposed.'

'Put it in this way,' Willoughby condescended. 'Has experience the same opinion of the world as ignorance?'

'It should have more charity.'

'Does virtue feel at home in the world?'

'Where it should be an example, to my idea.'

'Is the world agreeable to holiness?'

'Then, are you in favour of monasteries?'

He poured a little runlet of half-laughter over her head, of the sound assumed by genial compassion.

It is irritating to hear that when we imagine we have spoken to the point.

'Now in my letters, Clara . . .'

'I have no memory, Willoughby!'

'You will however have obeerved that I am not completely myself in my letters . . .'

'In your letters to men, you may be.'

The remark threw a pause across his thoughts. He was of a sensitiveness terribly tender. A single stroke on it reverberated swellingly within the man, and most, and infuriately searching, at the spots where he had been wounded, especially where he feared the world might have guessed the wound. Did she imply that he had no hand for love-letters? Was it her meaning that women would not have much taste for his epistolary correspondence? She had spoken in the plural, with an accent on 'men.' Had she heard of Constantia? Had she formed her own judgement about the creature? The supernatural sensitiveness of Sir Willoughby shrieked a peal of affirmatives.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII
The Betrothed

He had often meditated on the moral obligation of his unfolding to Clara the whole truth of his conduct to Constantia; for whom, as for other suicides, there were excuses. He at least was bound to supply them. She had behaved badly; but had he not given her some cause? If so, manliness was bound to confess it.

Supposing Clara heard the world's version first! Men whose pride is their backbone suffer convulsions where other men are barely aware of a shock, and Sir Willoughby was taken with galvanic jumpings of the spirit within him, at the idea of the world whispering to Clara that he had been jilted.

'My letters to men, you say, my love?'

'Your letters of business.'

'Completely myself in my letters of business?' He stared indeed.

She relaxed the tension of his figure by remarking: 'You are able to express yourself to men as your meaning dictates. In writing to . . . to us it is, I suppose, more difficult.'

'True, my love. I will not exactly say difficult. I can acknowledge no difficulty. Language, I should say, is not fitted to express emotion. Passion rejects it.'

'For dumb-show and pantomime?'

'No: but the writing of it coldly.'

'Ah, coldly!'

'My letters disappoint you?'

'I have not implied that they do.'

'My feelings, dearest, are too strong for transcription. I feel, pen in hand, like the mythological Titan at war with Jove, strong enough to hurl mountains, and finding nothing but pebbles. The simile is a good one. You must not judge of me by my letters.'

Digitized by Google

'I do not; I like them,' said Clara.

She blushed, eyed him hurriedly, and seeing him complacent, resumed: 'I prefer the pebble to the mountain; but if you read poetry you would not think human speech incapable of . . .'

'My love, I detest artifice. Poetry is a profession.'

'Our poets would prove to you . . .'

'As I have often observed, Clara, I am no poet.'

'I have not accused you, Willoughby.'

'No poet, and with no wish to be a poet. Were I one, my life would supply material, I can assure you, my love. My conscience is not entirely at rest. Perhaps the heaviest matter troubling it is that in which I was least wilfully guilty. You have heard of a Miss Durham?'

'I have heard—yes—of her.'

'She may be happy. I trust she is. If she is not, I cannot escape some blame. An instance of the difference between myself and the world now. The world charges it upon her. I have interceded to exonerate her.'

'That was generous, Willoughby.'

'Stay. I fear I was the primary offender. But I, Clara, I, under a sense of honour, acting under a sense of honour, would have carried my engagement through.'

'What had you done?'

'The story is long, dating from an early day, in the "downy antiquity of my youth," as Vernon says.'

'Mr. Whitford says that?'

'One of old Vernon's odd sayings. It's a story of an early fascination.'

'Papa tells me Mr. Whitford speaks at times with wise humour.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII
The Betrothed

'Family considerations—the lady's health among other things; her position in the calculations of relatives—intervened. Still there was the fascination. I have to own it. Grounds for feminine jealousy.'

'Is it at an end?'

'Now? with you? my darling Clara! indeed at an end, or could I have opened my inmost heart to you! Could I have spoken of myself so unreservedly that in part you know me as I know myself! Oh! but would it have been possible to enclose you with myself in that intimate union? so secret, unassailable!'

'You did not speak to her as you speak to me?'

'In no degree.'

'What *could* have . . .!' Clara checked the murmured exclamation.

Sir Willoughby's expoundings on his latest of texts would have poured forth, had not a footman stepped across the lawn to inform him that his builder was in the laboratory and requested permission to consult with him.

Clara's plea of a horror of a talk of bricks and joists excused her from accompanying him. He had hardly been satisfied by her manner, he knew not why. He left her, convinced that he must do and say more to reach down to her female intelligence.

She saw young Crossjay, springing with pots of jam in him, join his patron at a bound, and taking a lift of arms, fly aloft, clapping heels. Her reflections were confused. Sir Willoughby was admirable with the lad. 'Is he two men?' she thought: and the thought ensued: 'Am I unjust?' She headed a run with young Crossjay to divert her mind.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII

A Run with the Truant: a Walk with the Master

The sight of Miss Middleton running inflamed young Crossjay with the passion of the game of hare and hounds. He shouted a view-halloo, and flung up his legs. She was fleet; she ran as though a hundred little feet were bearing her onward smooth as water over the lawn and the sweeps of grass of the park, so swiftly did the hidden pair multiply one another to speed her. So sweet was she in her flowing pace, that the boy, as became his age, translated admiration into a dogged frenzy of pursuit, and continued pounding along, when far outstripped, determined to run her down or die. Suddenly her flight wound to an end in a dozen twittering steps, and she sank. Young Crossjay attained her, with just breath enough to say: 'You are a runner!'

'I forgot you had been having your tea, my poor boy,' said she.

'And you don't pant a bit!' was his encomium.

'Dear me, no; not more than a bird. You might as well try to catch a bird.'

Young Crossjay gave a knowing nod. 'Wait till I get my second wind.'

'Now you must confess that girls run faster than boys.'

'They may at the start.'

'They do everything better.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII
A Run with the Truant: a Walk with the Master

'They 're flash-in-the-pans.'

'They learn their lessons.'

'You can't make soldiers or sailors of them, though.'

'And that is untrue. Have you never read of Mary Ambree? and Mistress Hannah Snell of Pondicherry? And there was the bride of the celebrated William Taylor. And what do you say to Joan of Arc? What do you say to Boadicea? I suppose you have never heard of the Amazons.'

'They weren't English.'

'Then, it is your own countrywomen you decry, sir!'

Young Crossjay betrayed anxiety about his false position, and begged for the stories of Mary Ambree and the others who were English.

'See, you will not read for yourself, you hide and play truant with Mr. Whitford, and the consequence is you are ignorant of your country's history!' Miss Middleton rebuked him, enjoying his wriggle between a perception of her fun and an acknowledgement of his peccancy. She commanded him to tell her which was the glorious Valentine's day of our naval annals; the name of the hero of the day, and the name of his ship. To these questions his answers were as ready as the guns of the good ship Captain for the Spanish four-decker.

'And that you owe to Mr. Whitford,' said Miss Middleton.

'He bought me the books,' young Crossjay growled, and plucked at grass-blades and bit them, foreseeing dimly but certainly the termination of all this.

Miss Middleton lay back on the grass, and said: 'Are you going to be fond of me, Crossjay?'

Digitized by Google

The boy sat blinking. His desire was to prove to her that he was immoderately fond of her already; and he might have flown at her neck had she been sitting up, but her recumbency and eyelids half closed excited wonder in him and awe. His young heart beat fast.

'Because, my dear boy,' she said, leaning on her elbow, 'you are a very nice boy, but an ungrateful boy, and there is no telling whether you will not punish any one who cares for you. Come along with me; pluck me some of these cowslips, and the speedwells near them; I think we both love wild-flowers.' She rose and took his arm. 'You shall row me on the lake while I talk to you seriously.'

It was she, however, who took the sculls at the boathouse, for she had been a playfellow with boys, and knew that one of them engaged in a manly exercise is not likely to listen to a woman.

'Now, Crossjay,' she said. Dense gloom overcame him like a cowl. She bent across her hands to laugh. 'As if I were going to lecture you, you silly boy!' He began to brighten dubiously. 'I used to be as fond of birdsnesting as you are. I like brave boys, and I like you for wanting to enter the Royal Navy. Only, how can you if you do not learn? You must get the captains to pass you, you know. Somebody spoils you: Miss Dale or Mr. Whitford.'

'Do they!' sang out young Crossjay.

'Sir Willoughby does?'

'I don't know about spoil. I can come round him.'

'I am sure he is very kind to you. I daresay you think Mr. Whitford rather severe. You should remember he has to teach you, so that you may pass

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII
A Run with the Truant: a Walk with the Master

for the navy. You must not dislike him because he makes you work. Supposing you had blown yourself up to-day! You would have thought it better to have been working with Mr. Whitford.'

'Sir Willoughby says, when he's married, you won't let me hide.'

'Ah! It is wrong to pet a big boy like you. Does not he what you call tip you, Crossjay?'

'Generally half-crown pieces. I've had a crown-piece. I've had sovereigns.'

'And for that you do as he bids you? and he indulges you because you . . . Well, but though Mr. Whitford does not give you money, he gives you his time, he tries to get you into the navy.'

'He pays for me.'

'What do you say?'

'My keep. And, as for liking him, if he were at the bottom of the water here, I'd go down after him. I mean to learn. We're both of us here at six o'clock in the morning, when it's light, and have a swim. He taught me. Only, I never cared for school-books.'

'Are you quite certain that Mr. Whitford pays for you?'

'My father told me he did, and I must obey him. He heard my father was poor, with a family. He went down to see my father. My father came here once, and Sir Willoughby wouldn't see him. I know Mr. Whitford does. And Miss Dale told me he did. My mother says she thinks he does it to make up to us for my father's long walk in the rain and the cold he caught coming here to Patterne.'

'So you see you should not vex him, Crossjay. He

Digitized by Google

is a good friend to your father and to you. You ought to love him.'

'I like him, and I like his face.'

'Why his face?'

'It's not like those faces! Miss Dale and I talk about him. She thinks that Sir Willoughby is the best-looking man ever born.'

'Were you not speaking of Mr. Whitford?'

'Yes; old Vernon. That's what Sir Willoughby calls him,' young Crossjay excused himself to her look of surprise. 'Do you know what he makes me think of?—his eyes, I mean. He makes me think of Robinson Crusoe's old goat in the cavern. I like him because he's always the same, and you're not positive about some people. Miss Middleton, if you look on at cricket, in comes a safe man for ten runs. He may get more, and he never gets less; and you should hear the old farmers talk of him in the booth. That's just my feeling.'

Miss Middleton understood that some illustration from the cricketing-field was intended to throw light on the boy's feeling for Mr. Whitford. Young Crossjay was evidently warming to speak from his heart. But the sun was low, she had to dress for the dinner-table, and she landed him with regret, as at a holiday over. Before they parted, he offered to swim across the lake in his clothes, or dive to the bed for anything she pleased to throw, declaring solemnly that it should not be lost.

She walked back at a slow pace, and sang to herself above her darker-flowing thoughts, like the reed-warbler on the branch beside the night-stream; a simple song of a light-hearted sound, independent

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII
A Run with the Truant: a Walk with the Master

of the shifting black and grey of the flood underneath.

A step was at her heels.

'I see you have been petting my scapegrace.'

'Mr. Whitford! Yes; not petting, I hope. I tried to give him a lecture. He's a dear lad, but, I fancy, trying.'

She was in fine sunset colour, unable to arrest the mounting tide. She had been rowing, she said; and, as he directed his eyes, according to his wont, penetratingly, she defended herself by fixing her mind on Robinson Crusoe's old goat in the recess of the cavern.

'I must have him away from here very soon,' said Vernon. 'Here he's quite spoilt. Speak of him to Willoughby. I can't guess at his ideas of the boy's future, but the chance of passing for the navy won't bear trifling with, and if ever there was a lad made for the navy, it's Crossjay.'

The incident of the explosion in the laboratory was new to Vernon.

'And Willoughby laughed?' he said. 'There are seaport crammers who stuff young fellows for examination, and we shall have to pack off the boy at once to the best one of the lot we can find. I would rather have had him under me up to the last three months, and have made sure of some roots to what is knocked into his head. But he's ruined here. And I am going. So I shall not trouble him for many weeks longer. Dr. Middleton is well?'

'My father is well, yes. He pounced like a falcon on your notes in the library.'

Digitized by Google

Vernon came out with a chuckle.

'They were left to attract him. I am in for a controversy.'

'Papa will not spare you, to judge from his look.'

'I know the look.'

'Have you walked far to-day?'

'Nine and a half hours. My Flibbertigibbet is too much for me at times, and I had to walk off my temper.'

She cast her eyes on him, thinking of the pleasure of dealing with a temper honestly coltish, and manfully open to a specific.

'All those hours were required?'

'Not quite so long.'

'You are training for your Alpine tour.'

'It's doubtful whether I shall get to the Alps this year. I leave the Hall, and shall probably be in London with a pen to sell.'

'Willoughby knows that you leave him?'

'As much as Mont Blanc knows that he is going to be climbed by a party below. He sees a speck or two in the valley.'

'He has not spoken of it.'

'He would attribute it to changes . . .'

Vernon did not conclude the sentence.

She became breathless, without emotion, but checked by the barrier confronting an impulse to ask, what changes? She stooped to pluck a cowslip.

'I saw daffodils lower down the park,' she said. 'One or two; they're nearly over.'

'We are well off for wild-flowers here,' he answered.

'Do not leave him, Mr. Whitford.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII
A Run with the Truant: a Walk with the Master

'He will not want me.'

'You are devoted to him.'

'I can't pretend that.'

'Then it is the changes you imagine you foresee . . .? If any occur, why should they drive you away?'

'Well, I'm two and thirty, and have never been in the fray: a kind of nondescript, half-scholar, and by nature half billman or bowman or musketeer; if I'm worth anything, London's the field for me. But that's what I have to try.'

'Papa will not like your serving with your pen in London: he will say you are worth too much for that.'

'Good men are at it; I should not care to be ranked above them.'

'They are wasted, he says.'

'Error! If they have their private ambition, they may suppose they are wasted. But the value to the world of a private ambition I do not clearly understand.'

'You have not an evil opinion of the world?' said Miss Middleton, sick at heart as she spoke, with the sensation of having invited herself to take a drop of poison.

He replied: 'One might as well have an evil opinion of a river: here it's muddy, there it's clear; one day troubled, another at rest. We have to treat it with common sense.'

'Love it?'

'In the sense of serving it.'

'Not think it beautiful?'

'Part of it is, part of it the reverse.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII
A Run with the Truant: a Walk with the Master

'Papa would quote the "mulier formosa."'

'Except that "fish" is too good for the black extremity. "Woman" is excellent for the upper.'

'How do you say that?—not cynically, I believe. Your view commends itself to my reason.'

She was grateful to him for not stating it in ideal contrast with Sir Willoughby's view. If he had, so intensely did her youthful blood desire to be enamoured of the world, that she felt he would have lifted her off her feet. For a moment a gulf beneath had been threatening. When she said, 'Love it?' a little enthusiasm would have wafted her into space fierily as wine; but the sober, 'In the sense of serving it,' entered her brain, and was matter for reflection upon it and him.

She could think of him in pleasant liberty, uncorrected by her woman's instinct of peril. He had neither arts nor graces; nothing of his cousin's easy social front-face. She had once witnessed the military precision of his dancing, and had to learn to like him before she ceased to pray that she might never be the victim of it as his partner. He walked heroically, his pedestrian vigour being famous, but that means one who walks away from the sex, not excelling in the recreations where men and women join hands. He was not much of a horseman either. Sir Willoughby enjoyed seeing him on horseback. And he could scarcely be said to shine in a drawing-room, unless when seated beside a person ready for real talk. Even more than his merits, his demerits pointed him out as a man to be a friend to a young woman who wanted one. His way of life pictured to her troubled spirit an enviable smoothness: and his having

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII
A Run with the Truant: a Walk with the Master

achieved that smooth way she considered a sign of strength; and she wished to lean in idea upon some friendly strength. His reputation for indifference to the frivolous charms of girls clothed him with a noble coldness, and gave him the distinction of a far-seen solitary iceberg in Southern waters. The popular notion of hereditary titled aristocracy resembles her sentiment for a man that would not flatter and could not be flattered by her sex: he appeared superior almost to awfulness. She was young, but she had received much flattery in her ears, and by it she had been snared; and he, disdaining to practise the fowler's arts or to cast a thought on small fowls, appeared to her to have a pride founded on natural loftiness.

They had not spoken for a while, when Vernon said abruptly: 'The boy's future rather depends on you, Miss Middleton. I mean to leave as soon as possible, and I do not like his being here without me, though you will look after him, I have no doubt. But you may not at first see where the spoiling hurts him. He should be packed off at once to the crammer, before you are Lady Patterne. Use your influence. Willoughby will support the lad at your request. The cost cannot be great. There are strong grounds against my having him in London, even if I could manage it. May I count on you?'

'I will mention it: I will do my best,' said Miss Middleton, strangely dejected.

They were now on the lawn, where Sir Willoughby was walking with the ladies Eleanor and Isabel, his maiden aunts.

'You seem to have coursed the hare and captured the hart': he said to his bride.

Digitized by Google

'Started the truant and run down the pædagogue,' said Vernon.

'Ay, you won't listen to me about the management of that boy,' Sir Willoughby retorted.

The ladies embraced Miss Middleton. One offered up an ejaculation in eulogy of her looks, the other of her healthfulness: then both remarked that with indulgence young Crossjay could be induced to do anything. Clara wondered whether inclination or Sir Willoughby had disciplined their individuality out of them and made them his shadows, his echoes. She gazed from them to him, and feared him. But as yet she had not experienced the power in him which could threaten and wrestle to subject the members of his household to the state of satellites. Though she had in fact been giving battle to it for several months, she had held her own too well to perceive definitely the character of the spirit opposing her.

She said to the ladies: 'Ah, no! Mr. Whitford has chosen the only method for teaching a boy like Crossjay.'

'I propose to make a man of him,' said Sir Willoughby.

'What is to become of him if he learns nothing?'

'If he pleases me, he will be provided for. I have never abandoned a dependant.'

Clara let her eyes rest on his, and without turning or dropping, shut them.

The effect was discomforting to him. He was very sensitive to the intentions of eyes and tones; which was one secret of his rigid grasp of the dwellers in his household. They were taught that they had to

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII
A Run with the Truant: a Walk with the Master

render agreement under sharp scrutiny. Studious eyes, devoid of warmth, devoid of the shyness of sex, that suddenly closed on their look, signified a want of comprehension of some kind, it might be hostility of understanding. Was it possible he did not possess her utterly? He frowned up.

Clara saw the lift of his brows, and thought: 'My mind is my own, married or not.'

It was the point in dispute.

CHAPTER IX

Clara and Lætitia meet: they are compared

An hour before the time for lessons next morning young Crossjay was on the lawn with a big bunch of wild-flowers. He left them at the Hall-door for Miss Middleton, and vanished into bushes.

These vulgar weeds were about to be dismissed to the dust-heap by the great officials of the household; but as it happened that Miss Middleton had seen them from the window in Crossjay's hands, the discovery was made that they were indeed his presentation-bouquet, and a footman received orders to place them before her. She was very pleased. The arrangement of the flowers bore witness to fairer fingers than the boy's own in the disposition of the rings of colour, red campion and anemone, cowslip and speedwell, primroses and wood-hyacinths; and rising out of the blue was a branch bearing thick white blossom, so thick, and of so pure a whiteness, that

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX
Clara and Laetitia meet: they are compared

Miss Middleton, while praising Crossjay for soliciting the aid of Miss Dale, was at a loss to name the tree.

'It is a gardener's improvement on the Vestal of the forest, the wild cherry,' said Dr. Middleton, 'and in this case we may admit the gardener's claim to be valid, though I believe that, with his gift of double-blossom, he has improved away the fruit. Call this the Vestal of civilization, then; he has at least done something to vindicate the beauty of the office as well as the justness of the title.'

'It is Vernon's Holy Tree the young rascal has been despoiling,' said Sir Willoughby merrily.

Miss Middleton was informed that this double-blossom wild cherry-tree was worshipped by Mr. Whitford.

Sir Willoughby promised he would conduct her to it. 'You,' he said to her, 'can bear the trial; few complexions can; it is to most ladies a crueller test than snow. Miss Dale, for example, becomes old lace within a dozen yards of it. I should like to place her under the tree beside you.'

'Dear me, though; but that is investing the hamadryad with novel and terrible functions,' exclaimed Dr. Middleton.

Clara said, 'Miss Dale could drag me into a superior Court to show me fading beside her in gifts more valuable than a complexion.'

'She has a fine ability,' said Vernon.

All the world knew, so Clara knew of Miss Dale's romantic admiration of Sir Willoughby; she was curious to see Miss Dale and study the nature of a devotion that might be, within reason, imitable—for

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX
Clara and Lætitia meet: they are compared

a man who could speak with such steely coldness of the poor lady he had fascinated? Well, perhaps it was good for the hearts of women to be beneath a frost; to be schooled, restrained, turned inward on their dreams. Yes, then, his coldness was desireable; it encouraged an ideal of him. It suggested and seemed to propose to Clara's mind the divineness of separation instead of the deadly accuracy of an intimate perusal. She tried to look on him as Miss Dale might look, and while partly despising her for the dupery she envied, and more than criticizing him for the inhuman numbness of sentiment which offered up his worshipper to point a complimentary comparison, she was able to imagine a distance whence it would be possible to observe him uncritically, kindly, admiringly; as the moon a handsome mortal, for example.

In the midst of her thoughts, she surprised herself by saying, 'I certainly was difficult to instruct. I might see things clearer if I had a fine ability. I never remember to have been perfectly pleased with my immediate lesson . . .'

She stopped, wondering whither her tongue was leading her; then added, to save herself, 'And that may be why I feel for poor Crossjay.'

Mr. Whitford apparently did not think it remarkable that she should have been set off gabbling of 'a fine ability,' though the eulogistic phrase had been pronounced by him with an impressiveness to make his ear aware of an echo.

Sir Willoughby dispersed her vapourish confusion. 'Exactly,' he said. 'I have insisted with Vernon, I don't know how often, that you must have the lad

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX
Clara and Lætitia meet: they are compared

by his affections. He won't bear driving. It had no effect on me. Boys of spirit kick at it. I think I know boys, Clara.'

He found himself addressing eyes that regarded him as though he were a small speck, a pin's head, in the circle of their remote contemplation. They were wide; they closed.

She opened them to gaze elsewhere.

He was very sensitive.

Even then, when knowingly wounding him, or because of it, she was trying to climb back to that altitude of the thin division of neutral ground, from which we see a lover's faults and are above them, pure surveyors. She climbed unsuccessfully, it is true; soon despairing and using the effort as a pretext to fall back lower.

Dr. Middleton withdrew Sir Willoughby's attention from the imperceptible annoyance:

'No, sir, no; the birch! the birch! Boys of spirit commonly turn into solid men, and the solider the men the more surely do they vote for Busby. For me, I pray he may be immortal in Great Britain. Sea-air nor mountain-air is half so bracing. I venture to say that the power to take a licking is better worth having than the power to administer one. Horse him and birch him if Crossjay runs from his books.'

'It is your opinion, sir?' his host bowed to him affably, shocked on behalf of the ladies.

'So positively so, sir, that I will undertake without knowledge of their antecedents, to lay my finger on the men in public life who have not had early Busby. They are ill-balanced men. Their seat of reason is

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX
Clara and Lætitia meet: they are compared

not a concrete. They won't take rough and smooth as they come. They make bad blood, can't forgive, sniff right and left for approbation, and are excited to anger if an East wind does not flatter them. Why, sir, when they have grown to be seniors, you find these men mixed up with the nonsense of their youth; you see they are unthreshed. We English beat the world because we take a licking well. I hold it for a surety of a proper sweetness of blood.'

The smile of Sir Willoughby waxed ever softer as the shakes of his head increased in contradictoriness. 'And yet,' said he, with the air of conceding a little after having answered the Rev. Doctor and convicted him of error, 'Jack requires it to keep him in order. On board ship your argument may apply. Not, I suspect, among gentlemen. No.'

'Good-night to your gentlemen!' said Dr. Middleton.

Clara heard Miss Eleanor and Miss Isabel interchange remarks:

'Willoughby would not have suffered it!'

'It would entirely have altered him!'

She sighed and put a tooth on her underlip. The gift of humourous fancy is in women fenced round with forbidding placards; they have to choke it; if they perceive a piece of humour, for instance, the young Willoughby grasped by his master, and his horrified relatives rigid at the sight of preparations for the deed of sacrilege, they have to blindfold the mind's eye. They are society's hard-drilled soldiery, Prussians that must both march and think in step. It is for the advantage of the civilized world, if you like, since men have decreed it, or matrons have so read the decree; but here and there a younger woman,

Digitized by Google

haply an uncorrected insurgent of the sex matured here and there, feels that her lot was cast with her head in a narrower pit than her limbs.

CHAPTER IX
Clara and Lætitia meet: they are compared

Clara speculated as to whether Miss Dale might be perchance a person of a certain liberty of mind. She asked for some little, only some little, free play of mind in a house that seemed to wear, as it were, a cap of iron. Sir Willoughby not merely ruled, he throned, he inspired: and how? She had noticed an irascible sensitiveness in him alert against a shadow of disagreement; and as he was kind when perfectly appeased, the sop was offered by him for submission. She noticed that even Mr. Whitford forebore to alarm the sentiment of authority in his cousin. If he did not breathe Sir Willoughby, like the ladies Eleanor and Isabel, he would either acquiesce in a syllable, or be silent. He never strongly dissented. The habit of the house, with its iron cap, was on him; as it was on the servants, and would be, Oh, shudders of the shipwrecked that see their end in drowning! on the wife.

'When do I meet Miss Dale?' she inquired.

'This very evening, at dinner,' replied Sir Willoughby.

Then, thought she, there is that to look forward to!

She indulged her morbid fit, and shut up her senses that she might live in the anticipation of meeting Miss Dale; and, long before the approach of the hour, her hope of encountering any other than another dull adherent of Sir Willoughby had fled. So she was languid for two of the three minutes when she sat alone with Lætitia in the drawing-room before the ladies had assembled.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX
Clara and Lætitia meet: they are compared

'It is Miss Middleton?' Lætitia said, advancing to her. 'My jealousy tells me; for you have won my boy Crossjay's heart, and done more to bring him to obedience in a few minutes than we have been able to do in months.'

'His wild-flowers were so welcome to me,' said Clara.

'He was very modest over them. And I mention it because boys of his age usually thrust their gifts in our faces fresh as they pluck them, and you were to be treated quite differently.'

'We saw his good fairy's hand.'

'She resigns her office; but I pray you not to love him too well in return; for he ought to be away reading with one of those men who get boys through their examinations. He is, we all think, a born sailor, and his place is in the navy.'

'But, Miss Dale, I love him so well that I shall consult his interests and not my own selfishness. And, if I have influence, he will not be a week with you longer. It should have been spoken of to-day; I must have been in some dream; I thought of it, I know. I will not forget to do what may be in my power.'

Clara's heart sank at the renewed engagement and plighting of herself involved in her asking a favour, urging any sort of petition. The cause was good. Besides, she was plighted already.

'Sir Willoughby is really fond of the boy,' she said.

'He is fond of exciting fondness in the boy,' said Miss Dale. 'He has not dealt much with children. I am sure he likes Crossjay; he could not otherwise be so forbearing; it is wonderful what he endures and laughs at.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX
Clara and Laetitia meet: they are compared

Sir Willoughby entered. The presence of Miss Dale illuminated him as the burning taper lights up consecrated plate. Deeply respecting her for her constancy, esteeming her for a model of taste, he was never in her society without that happy consciousness of shining which calls forth the treasures of the man; and these it is no exaggeration to term unbounded, when all that comes from him is taken for gold.

The effect of the evening on Clara was to render her distrustful of her later antagonism. She had unknowingly passed into the spirit of Miss Dale, Sir Willoughby aiding; for she could sympathize with the view of his constant admirer on seeing him so cordially and smoothly gay; as one may say, domestically witty, the most agreeable form of wit. Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson discerned that he had a leg of physical perfection; Miss Dale distinguished it in him in the vital essence; and before either of these ladies he was not simply a radiant, he was a productive creature, so true it is that praise is our fructifying sun. He had even a touch of the romantic air which Clara remembered as her first impression of the favourite of the county: and strange she found it to observe this resuscitated idea confronting her experience. What if she had been captious, inconsiderate? O blissful revival of the sense of peace! The happiness of pain departing was all that she looked for, and her conception of liberty was to learn to love her chains, provided that he would spare her the caress. In this mood she sternly condemned Constantia. 'We must try to do good; we must not be thinking of ourselves; we must make the best of our path in life.' She revolved these

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX
Clara and Lætitia meet: they are compared

infantile precepts with humble earnestness; and not to be tardy in her striving to do good, with a remote but pleasurable glimpse of Mr. Whitford hearing of it, she took the opportunity to speak to Sir Willoughby on the subject of young Crossjay, at a moment when, alighting from horseback, he had shown himself to advantage among a gallant cantering company. He showed to great advantage on horseback among men, being invariably the best mounted, and he had a cavalierly style, possibly cultivated, but effective. On foot his raised head and half-dropped eyelids too palpably assumed superiority. 'Willoughby, I want to speak,' she said, and shrank as she spoke, lest he should immediately grant everything in the mood of courtship, and invade her respite; 'I want to speak of that dear boy Crossjay. You are fond of him. He is rather an idle boy here, and wasting time . . .'

'Now you are here, and when you are here for good, my love, for good . . .' he fluted away in loverliness, forgetful of Crossjay, whom he presently took up. 'The boy recognizes his most sovereign lady, and will do your bidding, though you should order him to learn his lessons! Who would not obey? Your beauty alone commands. But what is there beyond?—a grace, a hue divine, that sets you not so much above as apart, severed from the world.'

Clara produced an active smile in duty and pursued: 'If Crossjay were sent at once to some house where men prepare boys to pass for the navy, he would have his chance, and the navy is distinctly his profession. His father is a brave man, and he inherits bravery, and he has a passion for a sailor's life; only he must be able to pass his examination, and he has not much time.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX
Clara and Laetitia meet: they are compared

Sir Willoughby gave a slight laugh in sad amusement.

'My dear Clara, you adore the world; and I suppose you have to learn that there is not a question in this wrangling world about which we have not disputes and contests ad nauseam. I have my notions concerning Crossjay, Vernon has his. I should wish to make a gentleman of him. Vernon marks him for a sailor. But Vernon is the lad's protector, I am not. Vernon took him from his father to instruct him, and he has a right to say what shall be done with him. I do not interfere. Only I can't prevent the lad from liking me. Old Vernon seems to feel it. I assure you I hold entirely aloof. If I am asked, in spite of my disapproval of Vernon's plans for the boy, to subscribe to his departure, I can but shrug, because, as you see, I have never opposed. Old Vernon pays for him, he is the master, he decides, and if Crossjay is blown from the mast-head in a gale, the blame does not fall on me. These, my dear, are matters of reason.'

'I would not venture to intrude on them,' said Clara, 'if I had not suspected that money . . .'

'Yes,' cried Willoughby; 'and it is a part. And let old Vernon surrender the boy to me, I will immediately relieve him of the burden on his purse. Can I do that, my dear, for the furtherance of a scheme I condemn? The point is this: latterly I have invited Captain Patterne to visit me: just previous to his departure for the African Coast, where Government despatches Marines when there is no other way of killing them, I sent him a special invitation. He thanked me and curtly declined. The man, I may almost say, is my pensioner. Well, he calls himself a Patterne, he is

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX
Clara and Letitia meet: they are compared

undoubtedly a man of courage, he has elements of our blood, and the name. I think I am to be approved for desiring to make a better gentleman of the son than I behold in the father: and seeing that life from an early age on board ship has anything but made a gentleman of the father, I hold that I am right in shaping another course for the son.'

'Naval officers . . .' Clara suggested.

'Some,' said Willoughby. 'But they must be men of birth, coming out of homes of good breeding. Strip them of the halo of the title of naval officers, and I fear you would not often say gentlemen when they step into a drawing-room. I went so far as to fancy I had some claim to make young Crossjay something different. It can be done: the Patterne comes out in his behaviour to you, my love: it can be done. But if I take him, I claim undisputed sway over him. I cannot make a gentleman of the fellow if I am to compete with this person and that. In fine, he must look up to me, he must have one model.'

'Would you, then, provide for him subsequently?'

'According to his behaviour.'

'Would not that be precarious for him?'

'More so than the profession you appear inclined to choose for him?'

'But there he would be under clear regulations.'

'With me he would have to respond to affection.'

'Would you secure to him a settled income? For an idle gentleman is bad enough; a penniless gentleman . . .!'

'He has only to please me, my dear, and he will be launched and protected.'

'But if he does not succeed in pleasing you!'

Digitized by Google

'Is it so difficult?'

'Oh!' Clara fretted.

'You see, my love, I answer you,' said Sir Willoughby.

CHAPTER IX
Clara and Laetitia meet: they are compared

He resumed: 'But let old Vernon have his trial with the lad. He has his own ideas. Let him carry them out. I shall watch the experiment.'

Clara was for abandoning her task in sheer faintness.

'Is not the question one of money?' she said shyly, knowing Mr. Whitford to be poor.

'Old Vernon chooses to spend his money that way,' replied Sir Willoughby. 'If it saves him from breaking his shins and risking his neck on his Alps, we may consider it well employed.'

'Yes,' Clara's voice occupied a pause.

She seized her languor as it were a curling snake and cast it off. 'But I understand that Mr. Whitford wants your assistance. Is he not——not rich? When he leaves the Hall to try his fortune in literature in London, he may not be so well able to support Crossjay and obtain the instruction necessary for the boy: and it would be generous to help him.'

'Leaves the Hall!' exclaimed Willoughby. 'I have not heard a word of it. He made a bad start at the beginning, and I should have thought that would have tamed him: had to throw over his Fellowship; ahem. Then he received a small legacy some time back, and wanted to be off to push his luck in Literature: rank gambling, as I told him. Londonizing can do him no good. I thought that nonsense of his was over years ago. What is it he has from me?—about a hundred and fifty a year: and it might be doubled for the asking: and all the books he requires: and these writers and

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX
Clara and Lætitia meet: they are compared

scholars no sooner think of a book than they must have it. And do not suppose me to complain. I am a man who will not have a single shilling expended by those who serve immediately about my person. I confess to exacting that kind of dependency. Feudalism is not an objectionable thing if you can be sure of the lord. You know, Clara, and you should know me in my weakness too, I do not claim servitude, I stipulate for affection. I claim to be surrounded by persons loving me. And with one? . . . dearest! So that we two can shut out the world: we live what is the dream of others. Nothing imaginable can be sweeter. It is a veritable heaven on earth. To be the possessor of the whole of you! Your thoughts, hopes, all.'

Sir Willoughby intensified his imagination to conceive more: he could not, or could not express it, and pursued: 'But what is this talk of Vernon's leaving me? He cannot leave. He has barely a hundred a year of his own. You see, I consider him. I do not speak of the ingratitude of the wish to leave. You know, my dear, I have a deadly abhorrence of partings and such like. As far as I can, I surround myself with healthy people specially to guard myself from having my feelings wrung; and excepting Miss Dale, whom you like—my darling does like her?'—the answer satisfied him; 'with that one exception, I am not aware of a case that threatens to torment me. And here is a man, under no compulsion, talking of leaving the Hall! In the name of goodness, why? But why? Am I to imagine that the sight of perfect felicity distresses him? We are told that the world is "desperately wicked." I do not like to think it

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX
Clara and Lætitia meet: they are compared

of my friends; yet otherwise their conduct is often hard to account for.'

'If it were true, you would not punish Crossjay?' Clara feebly interposed.

'I should certainly take Crossjay and make a man of him after my own model, my dear. But who spoke to you of this?'

'Mr. Whitford himself. And let me give you my opinion, Willoughby, that he will take Crossjay with him rather than leave him, if there is a fear of the boy's missing his chance of the navy.'

'Marines appear to be in the ascendant,' said Sir Willoughby, astonished at the locution and pleading in the interests of a son of one. 'Then Crossjay he must take. I cannot accept half the boy. I am,' he laughed, 'the legitimate claimant in the application for judgement before the wise King. Besides, the boy has a dose of my blood in him; he has none of Vernon's, not one drop.'

'Ah!'

'You see, my love.'

'Oh! I do see; yes.'

'I put forth no pretensions to perfection,' Sir Willoughby continued. 'I can bear a considerable amount of provocation; still I can be offended, and I am unforgiving when I have been offended. Speak to Vernon, if a natural occasion should spring up. I shall, of course, have to speak to him. You may, Clara, have observed a man who passed me on the road as we were cantering home, without a hint of a touch to his hat. That man is a tenant of mine, farming six hundred acres, Hoppner by name: a man bound to remember that I have, independently of my

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX
Clara and Lætitia meet: they are compared

position, obliged him frequently. His lease of my ground has five years to run. I must say I detest the churlishness of our country population, and where it comes across me I chastise it. Vernon is a different matter: he will only require to be spoken to. One would fancy the old fellow laboured now and then under a magnetic attraction to beggary. My love,' he bent to her and checked their pacing up and down, 'you are tired?'

'I am very tired to-day,' said Clara.

His arm was offered. She laid two fingers on it, and they dropped when he attempted to press them to his rib.

He did not insist. To walk beside her was to share in the stateliness of her walking.

He placed himself at a corner of the doorway for her to pass him into the house, and doated on her cheek, her ear, and the softly dusky nape of her neck, where this way and that the little lighter-coloured irreclaimable curls running truant from the comb and the knot—curls, half-curls, root-curls, vine-ringlets, wedding-rings, fledgeling feathers, tufts of down, blown wisps—waved or fell, waved over or up or involutedly, or strayed, loose and downward, in the form of small silken paws, hardly any of them much thicker than a crayon shading, cunninger than long round locks of gold to trick the heart.

Lætitia had nothing to show resembling such beauty.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X

In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

Now Vernon was useful to his cousin; he was the accomplished secretary of a man who governed his estates shrewdly and diligently, but had been once or twice unlucky in his judgements pronounced from the magisterial bench as a Justice of the Peace, on which occasions a half-column of trenchant English supported by an apposite classical quotation impressed Sir Willoughby with the value of such a secretary in a controversy. He had no fear of that fiery dragon of scorching breath—the newspaper Press—while Vernon was his right-hand man; and as he intended to enter Parliament, he foresaw the greater need of him. Furthermore, he liked his cousin to date his own controversial writings, on classical subjects, from Patterne Hall. It caused his house to shine in a foreign field; proved the service of scholarship by giving it a flavour of a bookish aristocracy that, though not so well worth having, and indeed in itself contemptible, is above the material and titular; one cannot quite say how. There, however, is the flavour. Dainty sauces are the life, the nobility, of famous dishes; taken alone, the former would be nauseating, the latter plebeian. It is thus, or somewhat so, when you have a poet, still better a scholar, attached to your household. Sir Willoughby deserved to have him, for he was above his county friends in his apprehension

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

of the flavour bestowed by the man; and having him, he had made them conscious of their deficiency. His cook, M. Dehors, pupil of the great Godefroy, was not the only French cook in the county; but his cousin and secretary, the rising scholar, the elegant essayist, was an unparalleled decoration; of his kind, of course. Personally, we laugh at him; you had better not, unless you are fain to show that the higher world of polite literature is unknown to you. Sir Willoughby could create an abject silence at a county dinner-table by an allusion to Vernon 'at work at home upon his Etruscans or his Dorians'; and he paused a moment to let the allusion sink, laughed audibly to himself over his eccentric cousin, and let him rest.

In addition, Sir Willoughby abhorred the loss of a familiar face in his domestic circle. He thought ill of servants who could accept their dismissal without petitioning to stay with him. A servant that gave warning partook of a certain fiendishness. Vernon's project of leaving the Hall offended and alarmed the sensitive gentleman. 'I shall have to hand Letty Dale to him at last!' he thought, yielding in bitter generosity to the conditions imposed on him by the ungenerousness of another. For, since his engagement to Miss Middleton, his electrically forethoughtful mind had seen in Miss Dale, if she stayed in the neighbourhood, and remained unmarried, the governess of his infant children, often consulting with him. But here was a prospect dashed out. The two, then, may marry, and live in a cottage on the borders of his park; and Vernon can retain his post, and Lætitia her devotion. The risk of her casting it off had to be faced. Marriage has been known to have such an

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

effect on the most faithful of women, that a great passion fades to naught in their volatile bosoms when they have taken a husband. We see in women especially the triumph of the animal over the spiritual. Nevertheless, risks must be run for a purpose in view.

Having no taste for a discussion with Vernon, whom it was his habit to confound by breaking away from him abruptly when he had delivered his opinion, he left it to both the persons interesting themselves in young Crossjay to imagine that he was meditating on the question of the lad, and to imagine that it would be wise to leave him to meditate; for he could be preternaturally acute in reading any of his fellow-creatures if they crossed the current of his feelings. And, meanwhile, he instructed the ladies Eleanor and Isabel to bring Lætitia Dale on a visit to the Hall, where dinner-parties were soon to be given and a pleasing talker would be wanted; where also a woman of intellect, steeped in a splendid sentiment, hitherto a miracle of female constancy, might stir a younger woman to some emulation. Definitely to resolve to bestow Lætitia upon Vernon, was more than he could do; enough that he held the card.

Regarding Clara, his genius for perusing the heart which was not in perfect harmony with him through the series of responsive movements to his own, informed him of a something in her character that might have suggested to Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson her indefensible, absurd 'rogue in porcelain.' Idea there was none in that phrase; yet, if you looked on Clara as a delicately inimitable porcelain beauty, the suspicion of a delicately inimitable ripple over her features touched a thought of innocent roguery, wildwood

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

roguery; the likeness to the costly and lovely substance appeared to admit a fitness in the dubious epithet. He detested but was haunted by the phrase.

She certainly had at times the look of the nymph that has gazed too long on the faun, and has unwittingly copied his lurking lip and long sliding eye. Her play with young Crossjay resembled a return of the lady to the cat; she flung herself into it as if her real vitality had been in suspense till she saw the boy. Sir Willoughby by no means disapproved of a physical liveliness that promised him health in his mate; but he began to feel in their conversations that she did not sufficiently think of making herself a nest for him. Steely points were opposed to him when he, figuratively, bared his bosom to be taken to the softest and fairest. She reasoned: in other words, armed her ignorance. She reasoned against him publicly, and lured Vernon to support her. Influence is to be counted for power, and her influence over Vernon was displayed in her persuading him to dance one evening at Lady Culmer's, after his melancholy exhibitions of himself in the art; and not only did she persuade him to stand up fronting her, she manœuvred him through the dance like a clever boy cajoling a top to come to him without reeling, both to Vernon's contentment and to Sir Willoughby's; for he was the last man to object to a manifestation of power in his bride. Considering her influence with Vernon, he renewed the discourse upon young Crossjay; and, as he was addicted to system, he took her into his confidence, that she might be taught to look to him and act for him.

'Old Vernon has not spoken to you again of that lad?' he said.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

'Yes, Mr. Whitford has asked me.'

'He does not ask me, my dear!'

'He may fancy me of greater aid than I am.'

'You see, my love, if he puts Crossjay on me, he will be off. He has this craze for "enlisting" his pen in London, as he calls it; and I am accustomed to him; I don't like to think of him as a hack scribe, writing nonsense from dictation to earn a pitiful subsistence; I want him here; and, supposing he goes, he offends me; he loses a friend; and it will not be the first time that a friend has tried me too far; but, if he offends me, he is extinct.'

'Is what?' cried Clara, with a look of fright.

'He becomes to me at once as if he had never been. He is extinct.'

'In spite of your affection?'

'On account of it, I might say. Our nature is mysterious, and mine as much so as any. Whatever my regrets, he goes out. This is not a language I talk to the world. I do the man no harm; I am not to be named unchristian. But . . .!'

Sir Willoughby mildly shrugged, and indicated a spreading out of the arms.

'But do, do talk to me as you talk to the world, Willoughby; give me some relief!'

'My own Clara, we are one. You should know me, at my worst, we will say, if you like, as well as at my best.'

'Should I speak too?'

'What could you have to confess?'

She hung silent: the wave of an insane resolution swelled in her bosom and subsided before she said: 'Cowardice, incapacity to speak.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

'Women!' said he.

We do not expect so much of women; the heroic virtues as little as the vices. They have not to unfold the scroll of character.

He resumed, and by his tone she understood that she was now in the inner temple of him: 'I tell you these things; I quite acknowledge they do not elevate me. They help to constitute my character. I tell you most humbly that I have in me much too much of the fallen archangel's pride.'

Clara bowed her head over a sustained indrawn breath.

'It must be pride,' he said, in a reverie superinduced by her thoughtfulness over the revelation, and glorying in the black flames demoniacal wherewith he crowned himself.

'Can you not correct it?' said she.

He replied, profoundly vexed by disappointment: 'I am what I am. It might be demonstrated to you mathematically that it is corrected by equivalents or substitutions in my character. If it be a failing—assuming that.'

'It seems one to me: so cruelly to punish Mr. Whitford for seeking to improve his fortunes.'

'He reflects on my share in his fortunes. He has had but to apply to me, for his honorarium to be doubled.'

'He wishes for independence.'

'Independence of *me*!'

'Liberty!'

'At my expense!'

'Oh! Willoughby.'

'Ay, but this is the world, and I know it, my love; and beautiful as your incredulity may be, you will find

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

it more comforting to confide in my knowledge of the selfishness of the world. My sweetest, you will?—you do! For a breath of difference between us is intolerable. Do you not feel how it breaks our magic ring? One small fissure, and we have the world with its muddy deluge!—But my subject was old Vernon. Yes, I pay for Crossjay, if Vernon consents to stay. I waive my own scheme for the lad, though I think it the better one. Now, then, to induce Vernon to stay. He has his ideas about staying under a mistress of the household; and therefore, not to contest it—he is a man of no argument; a sort of lunatic determination takes the place of it with old Vernon!—let him settle close by me, in one of my cottages; very well, and to settle him we must marry him.'

'Who is there?' said Clara, beating for the lady in her mind.

'Women,' said Willoughby, 'are born match-makers, and the most persuasive is a young bride. With a man—and a man like old Vernon!—she is irresistible. It is my wish, and that arms you. It is your wish, that subjugates him. If he goes, he goes for good. If he stays, he is my friend. I deal simply with him, as with every one. It is the secret of authority. Now Miss Dale will soon lose her father. He exists on a pension; she has the prospect of having to leave the neighbourhood of the Hall, unless she is established near us. Her whole heart is in this region; it is the poor soul's passion. Count on her agreeing. But she will require a little wooing: and old Vernon wooing! Picture the scene to yourself, my love. His notion of wooing, I suspect, will be to treat the lady like

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

a lexicon, and turn over the leaves for the word, and fly through the leaves for another word, and so get a sentence. Don't frown at the poor old fellow, my Clara; some have the language on their tongues, and some have not. Some are very dry sticks; manly men, honest fellows, but so cut away, so polished away from the sex, that they are in absolute want of outsiders to supply the silken filaments to attach them. Actually!' Sir Willoughby laughed in Clara's face to relax the dreamy stoniness of her look. 'But I can assure you, my dearest, I have seen it. Vernon does not know how to speak —as *we* speak. He has, or he had, what is called a sneaking affection for Miss Dale. It was the most amusing thing possible: his courtship!—the air of a dog with an uneasy conscience, trying to reconcile himself with his master! We were all in fits of laughter. Of course it came to nothing.'

'Will Mr. Whitford,' said Clara, 'offend you to extinction if he declines?'

Willoughby breathed an affectionate 'Tush,' to her silliness.

'We bring them together, as we best can. You see, Clara, I desire, and I will make some sacrifices to detain him.'

'But what do you sacrifice?—a cottage?' said Clara, combative at all points.

'An ideal, perhaps. I lay no stress on sacrifice. I strongly object to separations. And therefore, you will say, I prepare the ground for unions? Put your influence to good service, my love. I believe you could persuade him to give us the Highland fling on the drawing-room table.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

'There is nothing to say to him of Crossjay?'

'We hold Crossjay in reserve.'

'It is urgent.'

'Trust me. I have my ideas. I am not idle. That boy bids fair for a capital horseman. Eventualities might . . .' Sir Willoughby murmured to himself, and addressing his bride; 'The cavalry? If we put him into the cavalry, we might make a gentleman of him—not be ashamed of him. Or, under certain eventualities, the Guards. Think it over, my love. De Craye, who will, I assume, act best man for me, supposing old Vernon to pull at the collar, is a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Guards, a thorough gentleman—of the brainless class, if you like, but an elegant fellow; an Irishman; you will see him, and I should like to set a naval lieutenant beside him in a drawing-room, for you to compare them and consider the model you would choose for a boy you are interested in. Horace is grace and gallantry incarnate; fatuous, probably: I have always been too friendly with him to examine closely. He made himself one of my dogs, though my elder, and seemed to like to be at my heels. One of the few men's faces I can call admirably handsome;—with nothing behind it, perhaps. As Vernon says, "a nothing picked by the vultures and bleached by the desert." Not a bad talker, if you are satisfied with keeping up the ball. He will amuse you. Old Horace does not know how amusing he is!'

'Did Mr. Whitford say that of Colonel de Craye?'

'I forget the person of whom he said it. So you have noticed old Vernon's foible? Quote him one of his epigrams, and he is in motion head and heels! It is an infallible receipt for tuneing him. If I want

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

to have him in good temper, I have only to remark, "as you said." I straighten his back instantly.'

'I,' said Clara, 'have noticed chiefly his anxiety concerning the boy; for which I admire him.'

'Creditable, if not particularly far-sighted and sagacious. Well, then, my dear, attack him at once: lead him to the subject of our fair neighbour. She is to be our guest for a week or so, and the whole affair might be concluded far enough to fix him before she leaves. She is at present awaiting the arrival of a cousin to attend on her father. A little gentle pushing will precipitate old Vernon on his knees as far as he ever can unbend them; but when a lady is made ready to expect a declaration, you know, why, she does not—does she?—demand the entire formula?—though some beautiful fortresses . . .'

He enfolded her. Clara was growing hardened to it. To this she was fated; and not seeing any way of escape, she invoked a friendly frost to strike her blood, and passed through the minute unfeelingly. Having passed it, she reproached herself for making so much of it, thinking it a lesser endurance than to listen to him. What could she do?—she was caged; by her word of honour, as she at one time thought; by her cowardice, at another; and dimly sensible that the latter was a stronger lock than the former, she mused on the abstract question whether a woman's cowardice can be so absolute as to cast her into the jaws of her aversion. Is it to be conceived? Is there not a moment when it stands at bay? But haggard-visaged Honour then starts up claiming to be dealt with in turn; for having courage restored to her, she must have the courage to break with honour, she

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

must dare to be faithless, and not merely say, I will be brave, but be brave enough to be dishonourable. The cage of a plighted woman hungering for her disengagement has two keepers, a noble and a vile; where on earth is creature so dreadfully enclosed? It lies with her to overcome what degrades her, that she may win to liberty by overcoming what exalts.

Contemplating her situation, this idea (or vapour of youth taking the godlike semblance of an idea) sprang, born of her present sickness, in Clara's mind; that it must be an ill-constructed tumbling world where the hour of ignorance is made the creator of our destiny by being forced to the decisive elections upon which life's main issues hang. Her teacher had brought her to contemplate his view of the world.

She thought likewise: how must a man despise women, who can expose himself as he does to me!

Miss Middleton owed it to Sir Willoughby Patterne that she ceased to think like a girl. When had the great change begun? Glancing back, she could imagine that it was near the period we call, in love, the first—almost from the first. And she was led to imagine it through having become barred from imagining her own emotions of that season. They were so dead as not to arise even under the forms of shadows in fancy. Without imputing blame to him, for she was reasonable so far, she deemed herself a person entrapped. In a dream somehow she had committed herself to a life-long imprisonment; and, oh terror! not in a quiet dungeon; the barren walls closed round her, talked, called for ardour, expected admiration.

She was unable to say why she could not give it; why she retreated more and more inwardly; why she

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

invoked the frost to kill her tenderest feelings. She was in revolt, until a whisper of the day of bells reduced her to blank submission; out of which a breath of peace drew her to revolt again in gradual rapid stages, and once more the aspect of that singular day of merry blackness felled her to earth. It was alive, it advanced, it had a mouth, it had a song. She received letters of bridesmaids writing of it, and felt them as waves that hurl a log of wreck to shore. Following which afflicting sense of antagonism to the whole circle sweeping on with her, she considered the possibility of her being in a commencement of madness. Otherwise might she not be accused of a capriciousness quite as deplorable to consider? She had written to certain of those young ladies not very long since of this gentleman—how?—in what tone? And was it her madness then?—her recovery now? It seemed to her that to have written of him enthusiastically resembled madness more than to shudder away from the union; but standing alone, opposing all she has consented to set in motion, is too strange to a girl for perfect justification to be found in reason when she seeks it.

Sir Willoughby was destined himself to supply her with that key of special insight which revealed and stamped him in a title to fortify her spirit of revolt, consecrate it almost.

The popular physician of the county and famous anecdotal wit, Dr. Corney, had been a guest at dinner overnight, and the next day there was talk of him, and of the resources of his art displayed by Armand Dehors on his hearing that he was to minister to the tastes of a gathering of hommes d'esprit. Sir Willoughby

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

glanced at Dehors with his customary benevolent irony in speaking of the persons, great in their way, who served him. 'Why he cannot give us daily so good a dinner, one must, I suppose, go to French nature to learn. The French are in the habit of making up for all their deficiencies with enthusiasm. They have no reverence; if I had said to him, "I want something particularly excellent, Dehors," I should have had a commonplace dinner. But they have enthusiasm on draught, and that is what we must pull at. Know one Frenchman and you know France. I have had Dehors under my eye two years, and I can mount his enthusiasm at a word. He took hommes d'esprit to denote men of letters. Frenchmen have destroyed their nobility, so, for the sake of excitement, they put up the literary man—not to worship him; that they can't do; it 's to put themselves in a state of effervescence. They will not have real greatness above them, so they have sham. That they may justly call it equality, perhaps! Ay, for all your shake of the head, my good Vernon! You see, human nature comes round again, try as we may to upset it, and the French only differ from us in wading through blood to discover that they are at their old trick once more: "I am your equal, sir, your born equal. Oh! you are a man of letters? Allow me to be in a bubble about you." Yes, Vernon, and I believe the fellow looks up to you as the head of the establishment. I am not jealous. Provided he attends to his functions! There's a French philosopher who 's for naming the days of the year after the birthdays of French men of letters, Voltaire-day, Rousseau-day, Racine-day, so on. Perhaps Vernon will inform us who takes April 1st.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

'A few trifling errors are of no consequence when you are in the vein of satire,' said Vernon. 'Be satisfied with knowing a nation in the person of a cook.'

'They may be reading us English off in a jockey!' said Dr. Middleton. 'I believe that jockeys are the exchange we make for cooks; and our neighbours do not get the best of the bargain.'

'No, but, my dear good Vernon, it's nonsensical,' said Sir Willoughby; 'why be bawling every day the names of men of letters?'

'Philosophers.'

'Well, philosophers.'

'Of all countries and times. And they are the benefactors of humanity.'

'Bene . . .!' Sir Willoughby's derisive laugh broke the word. 'There's a pretension in all that, irreconcilable with English sound sense. Surely you see it?'

'We might,' said Vernon, 'if you like, give alternative titles to the days, or have alternating days, devoted to our great families that performed meritorious deeds upon such a day.'

The rebel Clara, delighting in his banter, was heard; 'Can we furnish sufficient?'

'A poet or two could help us.'

'Perhaps a statesman,' she suggested.

'A pugilist, if wanted.'

'For blowy days,' observed Dr. Middleton, and hastily in penitence picked up the conversation he had unintentionally prostrated, with a general remark on new-fangled notions, and a word aside to Vernon; which created the blissful suspicion in Clara, that her

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

father was indisposed to second Sir Willoughby's opinions even when sharing them.

Sir Willoughby had led the conversation. Displeased that the lead should be withdrawn from him, he turned to Clara and related one of the after-dinner anecdotes of Dr. Corney; and another, with a vast deal of human nature in it, concerning a valetudinarian gentleman, whose wife chanced to be desperately ill, and he went to the physicians assembled in consultation outside the sick-room, imploring them by all he valued, and in tears, to save the poor patient for him, saying: 'She is everything to me, everything, and if she dies I am compelled to run the risks of marrying again; I must marry again; for she has accustomed me so to the little attentions of a wife, that in truth I can't, I can't lose her! She must be saved!' And the loving husband of any devoted wife wrung his hands.

'Now, there, Clara, there you have the Egoist,' added Sir Willoughby. 'That is the perfect Egoist. You see what he comes to—and his wife! The man was utterly unconscious of giving vent to the grossest selfishness.'

'An Egoist!' said Clara.

'Beware of marrying an Egoist, my dear!' He bowed gallantly; and so blindly fatuous did he appear to her, that she could hardly believe him guilty of uttering the words she had heard from him, and kept her eyes on him vacantly till she came to a sudden full stop in the thoughts directing her gaze. She looked at Vernon, she looked at her father, and at the ladies Eleanor and Isabel. None of them saw the man in the word, none noticed the word; yet this word was her medical herb, her illuminating lamp, the key of

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

him (and, alas, but she thought it by feeling her need of one), the advocate pleading in apology for her. Egoist! She beheld him—unfortunate, self-designated man that he was!—in his good qualities as well as bad under the implacable lamp, and his good were drenched in his first person singular. His generosity roared of *I* louder than the rest. Conceive him at the age of Dr. Corney's hero: 'Pray, save my wife for me. I shall positively have to get another if I lose her, and one who may not love me half so well, or understand the peculiarities of my character and appreciate my attitudes.' He was in his thirty-second year, therefore a young man, strong and healthy, yet his garrulous return to his principal theme, his emphasis on I and me, lent him the seeming of an old man spotted with decaying youth.

'Beware of marrying an Egoist.'

Would he help her to escape? The idea of the scene ensuing upon her petition for release, and the being dragged round the walls of his egoism, and having her head knocked against the corners, alarmed her with sensations of sickness.

There was the example of Constantia. But that desperate young lady had been assisted by a gallant, loving gentleman; she had met a Captain Oxford.

Clara brooded on those two until they seemed heroic. She questioned herself: Could she . . .? were one to come? She shut her eyes in languor, leaning the wrong way of her wishes, yet unable to say No.

Sir Willoughby had positively said beware! Marrying him would be a deed committed in spite of his express warning. She went so far as to conceive

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

him subsequently saying: 'I warned you.' She conceived the state of marriage with him as that of a woman tied not to a man of heart, but to an obelisk lettered all over with hieroglyphics, and everlastingly hearing him expound them, relishingly renewing his lectures on them.

Full surely this immoveable stone-man would not release her. This petrifaction of egoism would from amazedly to austerely refuse the petition. His pride would debar him from understanding her desire to be released. And if she resolved on it, without doing it straightway in Constantia's manner, the miserable bewilderment of her father, for whom such a complication would be a tragic dilemma, had to be thought of. Her father, with all his tenderness for his child, would make a stand on a point of honour; though certain to yield to her, he would be distressed, in a tempest of worry; and Dr. Middleton thus afflicted threw up his arms, he shunned books, shunned speech, and resembled a castaway on the ocean, with nothing between himself and his calamity. As for the world, it would be barking at her heels. She might call the man she wrenched her hand from, Egoist; jilt, the world would call her. She dwelt bitterly on her agreement with Sir Willoughby regarding the world, laying it to his charge that her garden had become a place of nettles, her horizon an unlighted fourth side of a square.

Clara passed from person to person visiting the Hall. There was universal, and as she was compelled to see, honest admiration of the host. Not a soul had a suspicion of his cloaked nature. Her agony of hypocrisy in accepting their compliments

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

as the bride of Sir Willoughby Patterne was poorly moderated by contempt of them for their infatuation. She tried to cheat herself with the thought that they were right and that she was the foolish and wicked inconstant. In her anxiety to strangle the rebelliousness which had been communicated from her mind to her blood, and was present with her whether her mind was in action or not, she encouraged the ladies Eleanor and Isabel to magnify the fictitious man of their idolatry, hoping that she might enter into them imaginatively, that she might to some degree subdue herself to the necessity of her position. If she partly succeeded in stupefying her antagonism, five minutes of him undid the work.

He requested her to wear the Patterne Pearls for a dinner-party of grand ladies, telling her that he would commission Miss Isabel to take them to her. Clara begged leave to decline them, on the plea of having no right to wear them. He laughed at her modish modesty. 'But really it might almost be classed with affectation,' said he. 'I give you the right. Virtually you are my wife.'

'No.'

'Before heaven?'

'No. We are not married.'

'As my betrothed, will you wear them, to please me?'

'I would rather not. I cannot wear borrowed jewels. These I cannot wear. Forgive me, I cannot. And Willoughby,' she said, scorning herself for want of fortitude in not keeping to the simply blunt provocative refusal, 'does one not look like a victim decked for the sacrifice?—the garlanded heifer you see on Greek vases, in that array of jewelry?'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

My dear Clara!' exclaimed the astonished lover, 'how can you term them borrowed, when they are the Patterne jewels, our family heirloom pearls, unmatched, I venture to affirm, decidedly in my country and many others, and passing to the use of the mistress of the house in the natural course of things?'

'They are yours, they are not mine.'

'Prospectively they are yours.'

'It would be to anticipate the fact to wear them.'

'With my consent, my approval? at my request?'

'I am not yet . . . I never may be . . .'

'My wife?' He laughed triumphantly, and silenced her by manly smothering.

Her scruple was perhaps an honourable one, he said. Perhaps the jewels were safer in their iron box. He had merely intended a surprise and gratification to her.

Courage was coming to enable her to speak more plainly, when his discontinuing to insist on her wearing the jewels, under an appearance of deference to her wishes, disarmed her by touching her sympathies.

She said, however: 'I fear we do not often agree, Willoughby.'

'When you are a little older!' was the irritating answer.

'It would then be too late to make the discovery.'

'The discovery, I apprehend, is not imperative, my love.'

'It seems to me that our minds are opposed.'

'I should,' said he, 'have been awake to it at a single indication, be sure.'

'But I know,' she pursued, 'I have learnt, that the ideal of conduct for women, is to subject their minds to the part of an accompaniment.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

'For women, my love? my wife will be in natural harmony with me.'

'Ah!' She compressed her lips. The yawn would come. 'I am sleepier here than anywhere.'

'Ours, my Clara, is the finest air of the kingdom. It has the effect of sea-air.'

'But if I am always asleep here?'

'We shall have to make a public exhibition of the Beauty.'

This dash of his liveliness defeated her.

She left him, feeling the contempt of the brain feverishly quickened and fine-pointed, for the brain chewing the cud in the happy pastures of unawakenedness. So violent was the fever, so keen her introspection, that she spared few, and Vernon was not among them. Young Crossjay, whom she considered the least able of all to act as an ally, was the only one she courted with a real desire to please him; he was the one she affectionately envied; he was the youngest, the freest, he had the world before him, and he did not know how horrible the world was, or could be made to look. She loved the boy from expecting nothing of him. Others, Vernon Whitford, for instance, could help, and moved no hand. He read her case. A scrutiny so penetrating under its air of abstract thoughtfulness, though his eyes did but rest on her a second or two, signified that he read her line by line, and to the end—excepting what she thought of him for probing her with that sharp steel of insight without a purpose.

She knew her mind's injustice. It was her case, her lamentable case—the impatient panic-stricken nerves of a captured wild creature, which cried for

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

help. She exaggerated her sufferings to get strength to throw them off, and lost it in the recognition that they were exaggerated: and out of the conflict issued recklessness, with a cry as wild as any coming of madness; for she did not blush in saying to herself; 'If some one loved me!' Before hearing of Constantia, she had mused upon liberty as a virgin Goddess,—men were out of her thoughts; even the figure of a rescuer, if one dawned in her mind, was more angel than hero. That fair childish maidenliness had ceased. With her body straining in her dragon's grasp, with the savour of loathing, unable to contend, unable to speak aloud, she began to speak to herself, and all the health of her nature made her outcry womanly:—'If I were loved!'—not for the sake of love, but for free breathing; and her utterance of it was to ensure life and enduringness to the wish, as the yearning of a mother on a drowning ship is to get her infant to shore. 'If some noble gentleman could see me as I am and not disdain to aid me! Oh! to be caught up out of this prison of thorns and brambles. I cannot tear my own way out. I am a coward. My cry for help confesses that. A beckoning of a finger would change me, I believe. I could fly bleeding and through hootings to a comrade. Oh! a comrade. I do not want a lover. I should find another Egoist, not so bad, but enough to make me take a breath like death. I could follow a soldier, like poor Sally or Molly. He stakes his life for his country, and a woman may be proud of the worst of men who do that. Constantia met a soldier. Perhaps she prayed and her prayer was altered. She did ill. But, oh, how I love her for it! His name was Harry Oxford. Papa would call him her Perseus.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X
In which Sir Willoughby chances to supply the Title for Himself

She must have felt that there was no explaining what she suffered. She had only to act, to plunge. First she fixed her mind on Harry Oxford. To be able to speak his name and see him awaiting her, must have been relief, a reprieve. She did not waver, she cut the links, she signed herself over. O brave girl! what do you think of me? But I have no Harry Whitford, I am alone. Let anything be said against women; we must be very bad to have such bad things written of us: only, say this, that to ask them to sign themselves over by oath and ceremony, because of an ignorant promise, to the man they have been mistaken in, is . . . it is——' the sudden consciousness that she had put another name for Oxford, struck her a buffet, drowning her in crimson.

CHAPTER XI

The Double-Blossom Wild Cherry-Tree

Sir Willoughby chose a moment when Clara was with him and he had a good retreat through folding-windows to the lawn, in case of cogency on the enemy's part, to attack his cousin regarding the preposterous plot to upset the family by a scamper to London: 'By the way, Vernon, what is this you've been mumbling to everybody save me, about leaving us to pitch yourself into the stew-pot and be made broth of?—London is no better, and you are fit for considerably better. Don't, I beg you, continue to annoy me. Take a run abroad, if you are restless. Take two or three months, and join us as we are travelling home; and then think

Digitized by Google

of settling, pray. Follow my example, if you like. You can have one of my cottages, or a place built for you. Anything to keep a man from destroying the sense of stability about one. In London, my dear old fellow, you lose your identity. What are you there? I ask you, what? One has the feeling of the house crumbling when a man is perpetually for shifting and cannot fix himself. Here you are known, you can study at your ease; up in London you are nobody; I tell you honestly, I feel it myself; a week of London literally drives me home to discover the individual where I left him. Be advised. You don't mean to go.'

'I have the intention,' said Vernon.

'Why?'

'I've mentioned it to you.'

'To my face?'

'Over your shoulder, is generally the only chance you give me.'

'You have not mentioned it to me, to my knowledge. As to the reason, I might hear a dozen of your reasons, and I should not understand one. It's against your interests and against my wishes. Come, friend, I am not the only one you distress. Why, Vernon, you yourself have said that the English would be very perfect Jews if they could manage to live on the patriarchal system. You said it, yes, you said it!—but I recollect it clearly. Oh! as for your double-meanings, you said the thing, and you jeered at the incapacity of English families to live together, on account of bad temper; and now you are the first to break up our union! I decidedly do not profess to be perfect Jew, but I do . . .'

Sir Willoughby caught signs of a probably smiling

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI
The Double-Blossom Wild Cherry-Tree

commerce between his bride and his cousin. He raised his face, appeared to be consulting his eyelids, and resolved to laugh: 'Well, I own it, I do like the idea of living patriarchally.' He turned to Clara. 'The Rev. Doctor one of us!'

'My father?' she said.

'Why not?'

'Papa's habits are those of a scholar.'

'That you might not be separated from him, my dear.'

Clara thanked Sir Willoughby for the kindness of thinking of her father, mentally analyzing the kindness, in which at least she found no unkindness, scarcely egoism, though she knew it to be there.

'We might propose it,' said he.

'As a compliment?'

'If he would condescend to accept it as a compliment. These great scholars! . . . And if Vernon goes, our inducement for Dr. Middleton to stay . . . But it is too absurd for discussion. Oh, Vernon, about Master Crossjay; I will see to it.'

He was about to give Vernon his shoulder and step into the garden, when Clara said, 'You will have Crossjay trained for the navy, Willoughby? There is not a day to lose.'

'Yes, yes; I will see to it. Depend on me for holding the young rascal in view.'

He presented his hand to her to lead her over the step to the gravel, surprised to behold how flushed she was.

She responded to the invitation by putting her hand forth from a bent elbow, with hesitating fingers. 'It should not be postponed, Willoughby.'

Digitized by Google

Her attitude suggested a stipulation before she touched him.

'It's an affair of money, as you know, Willoughby,' said Vernon. 'If I'm in London, I can't well provide for the boy for some time to come, or it's not certain that I can.'

'Why on earth should you go!'

'That's another matter. I want you to take my place with him.'

'In which case the circumstances are changed. I am responsible for him, and I have a right to bring him up according to my own prescription.'

'We are likely to have one idle lout the more.'

'I guarantee to make a gentleman of him.'

'We have too many of your gentlemen already.'

'You can't have enough, my good Vernon.'

'They're the national apology for indolence. Training a penniless boy to be one of them is nearly as bad as an education in a thieves' den; he will be just as much at war with society, if not game for the police.'

'Vernon, have you seen Crossjay's father, the now Captain of Marines? I think you have.'

'He's a good man and a very gallant officer.'

'And in spite of his qualities he's a cub, and an old cub. He is a captain now, but he takes that rank very late, you will own. There you have what you call a good man, undoubtedly a gallant officer, neutralized by the fact that he is not a gentleman. Holding intercourse with him is out of the question. No wonder Government declines to advance him rapidly. Young Crossjay does not bear your name. He bears mine, and on that point alone I should have a voice in the settlement of his career. And

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI
The Double-Blossom Wild Cherry-Tree

I say emphatically that a drawing-room approval of a young man is the best certificate for his general chances in life. I know of a City of London merchant of some sort, and I know a firm of lawyers, who will have none but University men in their office; at least, they have the preference.'

'Crossjay has a bullet head, fit neither for the University nor the drawing-room,' said Vernon; 'equal to fighting and dying for you, and that's all.'

Sir Willoughby contented himself with replying, 'The lad is a favourite of mine.'

His anxiety to escape a rejoinder caused him to step into the garden, leaving Clara behind him. 'My love!' said he, in apology as he turned to her. She could not look stern, but she had a look without a dimple to soften it, and her eyes shone. For she had wagered in her heart that the dialogue she provoked upon Crossjay would expose the Egoist. And there were other motives, wrapped up and intertwisted, unrecognizable, sufficient to strike her with worse than the flush of her self-knowledge of wickedness when she detained him to speak of Crossjay before Vernon.

At last it had been seen that she was conscious of suffering in her association with this Egoist! Vernon stood for the world taken into her confidence. The world, then, would not think so ill of her, she thought hopefully, at the same time that she thought most evilly of herself. But self-accusations were for the day of reckoning; she would and must have the world with her, or the belief that it was coming to her, in the terrible struggle she foresaw within her horizon of self, now her utter boundary. She needed it for the inevitable conflict. Little sacrifices of her honesty

Digitized by Google

might be made. Considering how weak she was, how solitary, how dismally entangled, daily disgraced beyond the power of any veiling to conceal from her fiery sensations, a little hypocrisy was a poor girl's natural weapon. She crushed her conscientious mind with the assurance that it was magnifying trifles: not entirely unaware that she was magnifying trifles: not entirely unaware that she was thereby preparing it for a convenient blindness in the presence of dread alternatives; but the pride of laying such stress on small sins gave her purity a blush of pleasure and overcame the inner warning. In truth she dared not think evilly of herself for long, sailing into battle as she was. Nuns and anchorites may; they have leisure. She regretted the forfeits she had to pay for self-assistance and, if it might be won, the world's; regretted, felt the peril of the loss, and took them up and flung them.

CHAPTER XI
The Double-Blossom Wild Cherry-Tree

'You see, old Vernon has no argument,' Willoughby said to her.

He drew her hand more securely on his arm, to make her sensible that she leaned on a pillar of strength.

'Whenever the little brain is in doubt, perplexed, undecided which course to adopt, she will come to me, will she not? I shall always listen,' he resumed soothingly. 'My own! and I to you when the world vexes me. So we round our completeness. You will know me; you will know me in good time. I am not a mystery to those to whom I unfold myself. I do not pretend to mystery: yet, I will confess, your home—your heart's—Willoughby is not exactly identical with the Willoughby before the world. One must be armed against that rough beast.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI
The Double-Blossom Wild Cherry-Tree

Certain is the vengeance of the young upon monotony; nothing more certain. They do not scheme it, but sameness is a poison to their systems; and vengeance is their heartier breathing, their stretch of the limbs, run in the fields; nature avenges them.

When does Colonel de Craye arrive?' said Clara.

'Horace? In two or three days. You wish him to be on the spot to learn his part, my love?'

She had not flown forward to the thought of Colonel de Craye's arrival; she knew not why she had mentioned him; but now she flew back, shocked, first into shadowy subterfuge, and then into the criminal's dock.

'I do not wish him to be here. I do not know that he has a part to learn. I have no wish. Willoughby, did you not say I should come to you and you would listen?—will you listen? I am so commonplace that I shall not be understood by you unless you take my words for the very meaning of the words. I am unworthy. I am volatile. I love my liberty. I want to be free . . .'

'Flitch!' he called.

It sounded necromantic.

'Pardon me, my love,' he said. 'The man you see yonder violates my express injunction that he is not to come on my grounds, and here I find him on the borders of my garden!'

Sir Willoughby waved his hand to the abject figure of a man standing to intercept him.

'Volatile, unworthy, liberty—my dearest!' he bent to her when the man had appeased him by departing, 'You are at liberty within the law, like all good women; I shall control and direct your volatility; and

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI
The Double-Blossom Wild Cherry-Tree

your sense of worthiness must be re-established when we are more intimate; it is timidity. The sense of unworthiness is a guarantee of worthiness ensuing. I believe I am in the vein of a sermon! Whose the fault? The sight of that man was annoying. Flitch was a stable-boy, groom, and coachman, like his father before him, at the Hall thirty years; his father died in our service. Mr. Flitch had not a single grievance here; only one day the demon seizes him with the notion of bettering himself, he wants his independence, and he presents himself to me with a story of a shop in our county town.—Flitch! remember, if you go you go for good.—Oh! he quite comprehended.—Very well; good-bye, Flitch;—The man was respectful: he looked the fool he was very soon to turn out to be. Since then, within a period of several years, I have had him, against my express injunctions, ten times on my grounds. It's curious to calculate. Of course the shop failed, and Flitch's independence consists in walking about with his hands in his empty pockets, and looking at the Hall from some elevation near.'

'Is he married? Has he children?' said Clara.

'Nine; and a wife that cannot cook or sew or wash linen.'

'You could not give him employment?'

'After his having dismissed himself?'

'It might be overlooked.'

'Here he was happy. He decided to go elsewhere, to be free—of course, of my yoke. He quitted my service against my warning. Flitch, we will say, emigrated with his wife and nine children, and the ship foundered. He returns, but his place is filled; he is a ghost here, and I object to ghosts.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI
The Double-Blossom Wild Cherry-Tree

'Some work might be found for him.'

'It will be the same with old Vernon, my dear. If he goes, he goes for good. It is the vital principle of my authority to insist on that. A dead leaf might as reasonably demand to return to the tree. Once off, off for all eternity! I am sorry, but such was your decision, my friend. I have, you see, Clara, elements in me——'

'Dreadful!'

'Exert your persuasive powers with Vernon. You can do well-nigh what you will with the old fellow. We have Miss Dale this evening for a week or two. Lead him to some ideas of her.—Elements in me, I was remarking, which will no more bear to be handled carelessly than gunpowder. At the same time, there is no reason why they should not be respected, managed with some degree of regard for me and attention to consequences. Those who have not done so have repented.'

'You do not speak to others of the elements in you,' said Clara.

'I certainly do not: I have but one bride,' was his handsome reply.

'Is it fair to me that you should show me the worst of you?'

'All myself, my own?'

His ingratiating droop and familiar smile rendered 'All myself' so affectionately meaningful in its happy reliance upon her excess of love, that at last she understood she was expected to worship him and uphold him for whatsoever he might be, without any estimation of qualities: as indeed love does, or young love does: as she perhaps did once, before he

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI
The Double-Blossom Wild Cherry-Tree

chilled her senses. That was before her 'little brain' had become active and had turned her senses to revolt.

It was on the full river of love that Sir Willoughby supposed the whole floating bulk of his personality to be securely sustained; and therefore it was that, believing himself swimming at his ease, he discoursed of himself.

She went straight away from that idea with her mental exclamation: 'Why does he not paint himself in brighter colours to me!' and the question: 'Has he no ideal of generosity and chivalry?'

But the unfortunate gentleman imagined himself to be loved, on Love's very bosom. He fancied that everything relating to himself excited maidenly curiosity, womanly reverence, ardours to know more of him, which he was ever willing to satisfy by repeating the same things. His notion of women was the primitive black and white: there are good women, bad women; and he possessed a good one. His high opinion of himself fortified the belief that Providence, as a matter of justice and fitness, must necessarily select a good one for him—or what are we to think of Providence? And this female, shaped by that informing hand, would naturally be in harmony with him, from the centre of his profound identity to the raying circle of his variations. Know the centre, you know the circle, and you discover that the variations are simply characteristics, but you must travel on the rays from the circle to get to the centre. Consequently Sir Willoughby put Miss Middleton on one or other of these converging lines from time to time. Us, too, he drags into the deeps, but when we have harpooned

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI
The Double-Blossom Wild Cherry-Tree

a whale and are attached to the rope, down we must go; the miracle is to see us rise again.

Women of mixed essences shading off the divine to the considerably lower, were outside his vision of woman. His mind could as little admit an angel in pottery as a rogue in porcelain. For him they were what they were when fashioned at the beginning; many cracked, many stained, here and there a perfect specimen designed for the elect of men. At a whisper of the world he shut the prude's door on them with a slam; himself would have branded them with the letters in the hue of fire. Privately he did so: and he was constituted by his extreme sensitiveness and taste for ultra-feminine refinement to be a severe critic of them during the carnival of egoism, the love-season. Constantia . . . can it be told? She had been, be it said, a fair and frank young merchant with him in that season; she was of a nature to be a mother of heroes; she met the salute, almost half-way, ingenuously unlike the coming mothers of the regiments of marionnettes, who retire in vapours, downcast, as by convention; ladies most flattering to the egoistical gentleman, for they proclaim him the 'first.' Constantia's offence had been no greater, but it was not that dramatic performance of purity which he desired of an affianced lady, and so the offence was great.

The love-season is the carnival of egoism, and it brings the touchstone to our natures. I speak of love, not the mask, and not of the flutings upon the theme of love, but of the passion; a flame having, like our mortality, death in it as well as life, that may or may not be lasting. Applied to Sir Willoughby, as to thousands of civilized males, the touchstone found

Digitized by Google

him requiring to be dealt with by his betrothed as an original savage. She was required to play incessantly on the first reclaiming chord which led our ancestral satyr to the measures of the dance, the threading of the maze, and the setting conformably to his partner before it was accorded to him to spin her with both hands and a chirrup of his frisky heels. To keep him in awe and hold him enchained, there are things she must never do, dare never say, must not think. She must be cloistral. Now, strange and awful though it be to hear, women perceive this requirement of them in the spirit of the man; they perceive, too, and it may be gratefully, that they address their performances less to the taming of the green and prankish monsieur of the forest than to the pacification of a voracious æsthetic gluttony, craving them insatiably, through all the tenses, with shrieks of the lamentable letter 'I' for their purity. Whether they see that it has its foundation in the sensual, and distinguish the ultra-refined but lineally great-grandson of the Hoof in this vast and dainty exacting appetite is uncertain. They probably do not; the more the damage; for in the appeasement of the glutton they have to practise much simulation; they are in their way losers like their ancient mothers. It is the palpable and material of them still which they are tempted to flourish, wherewith to invite and allay pursuit: a condition under which the spiritual, wherein their hope lies, languishes. The capaciously strong in soul among women will ultimately detect an infinite grossness in the demand for purity infinite, spotless bloom. Earlier or later they see they have been victims of the singular Egoist, have worn a mask of ignorance

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI
The Double-Blossom Wild Cherry-Tree

to be named innocent, have turned themselves into market produce for his delight, and have really abandoned the commodity in ministering to the lust for it, suffered themselves to be dragged ages back in playing upon the fleshly innocence of happy accident to gratify his jealous greed of possession, when it should have been their task to set the soul above the fairest fortune, and the gift of strength in women beyond ornamental whiteness. Are they not of a nature warriors, like men?—men's mates to bear them heroes instead of puppets? But the devouring male Egoist prefers them as inanimate overwrought polished pure-metal precious vessels, fresh from the hands of the artificer, for him to walk away with hugging, call all his own, drink of, and fill and drink of, and forget that he stole them.

This running off on a by-road is no deviation from Sir Willoughby Patterne and Miss Clara Middleton. He, a fairly intelligent man, and very sensitive, was blinded to what was going on within her visibly enough, by her production of the article he demanded of her sex. He had to leave the fair young lady to ride to his county-town, and his design was to conduct her through the covert of a group of laurels, there to revel in her soft confusion. She resisted; nay, resolutely returned to the land-sward. He contrasted her with Constantia in the amorous time, and rejoiced in his disappointment. He saw the Goddess Modesty guarding Purity; and one would be bold to say that he did not hear the Precepts, Purity's aged grannams maternal and paternal, cawing approval of her over their munching gums. And if you ask whether a man, sensitive and a lover, can be so

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI
The Double-Blossom Wild Cherry-Tree

blinded, you are condemned to re-peruse the foregoing paragraph.

Miss Middleton was not sufficiently instructed in the position of her sex to know that she had plunged herself in the thick of the strife of one of their great battles. Her personal position, however, was instilling knowledge rapidly, as a disease in the frame teaches us what we are and have to contend with. Could she marry this man? He was evidently manageable. Could she condescend to the use of arts in managing him to obtain a placable life?—a horror of swampy flatness! So vividly did the sight of that dead heaven over an unvarying level earth, swim on her fancy, that she shut her eyes in angry exclusion of it as if it were outside, assailing her: and she nearly stumbled upon young Crossjay.

'Oh! have I hurt you?' he cried.

'No,' said she, 'it was my fault. Lead me somewhere, away from everybody.'

The boy took her hand, and she resumed her thoughts; and, pressing his fingers and feeling warm to him both for his presence and silence, so does the blood in youth lead the mind, even cool and innocent blood, even with a touch, that she said to herself: 'And if I marry, and then . . . Where will honour be then? I marry him to be true to my word of honour, and if then . . .!' An intolerable languor caused her to sigh profoundly. It is written as she thought it; she thought in blanks, as girls do, and some women. A shadow of the male Egoist is in the chamber of their brains overawing them.

'Were I to marry, and to run!' There is the thought; she is offered up to your mercy. We are

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI
The Double-Blossom Wild Cherry-Tree

dealing with a girl feeling herself desperately situated, and not a fool.

'I'm sure you're dead tired, though,' said Crossjay.

'No, I am not; what makes you think so?' said Clara.

'I do think so.'

'But why do you think so?'

'You're so hot.'

'What makes you think that?'

'You're so red.'

'So are you, Crossjay.'

'I'm only red in the middle of the cheeks, except when I've been running. And then you talk to yourself, just as boys do when they are blown.'

'Do they?'

'They say, "I know I could have kept up longer," or, "my buckle broke," all to themselves, when they break down running.'

'And you have noticed that?'

'And, Miss Middleton, I don't wish you were a boy, but I should like to live near you all my life and be a gentleman. I'm coming with Miss Dale this evening to stay at the Hall and be looked after, instead of stopping with her cousin, who takes care of her father. Perhaps you and I'll play chess at night.'

'At night you will go to bed, Crossjay.'

'Not if I have Sir Willoughby to catch hold of. He says I'm an authority on birds' eggs. I can manage rabbits and poultry. Isn't a farmer a happy man? But he doesn't marry ladies. A cavalry officer has the best chance.'

'But you are going to be a naval officer.'

'I don't know. It's not positive. I shall bring my

Digitized by Google

two dormice, and make them perform gymnastics on the dinner-table. They're such dear little things. Naval officers are not like Sir Willoughby.'

'No, they are not,' said Clara; 'they give their lives to their country.'

'And then they're dead,' said Crossjay.

Clara wished Sir Willoughby were confronting her: she could have spoken.

She asked the boy where Mr. Whitford was. Crossjay pointed very secretly in the direction of the double-blossom wild-cherry. Coming within gaze of the stem she beheld Vernon stretched at length, reading, she supposed; asleep, she discovered: his finger in the leaves of a book; and what book? She had a curiosity to know the title of the book he would read beneath these boughs, and grasping Crossjay's hand fast she craned her neck, as one timorous of a fall in peeping over chasms, for a glimpse of the page; but immediately, and still with a bent head, she turned her face to where the load of virginal blossom, whiter than summer-cloud on the sky, showered and drooped and clustered so thick as to claim colour and seem, like higher Alpine snows in noon-sunlight, a flush of white. From deep to deeper heavens of white, her eyes perched and soared. Wonder lived in her. Happiness in the beauty of the tree pressed to supplant it, and was more mortal and narrower. Reflection came, contracting her vision and weighing her to earth. Her reflection was: 'He must be good who loves to lie and sleep beneath the branches of this tree!' She would rather have clung to her first impression: wonder so divine, so unbounded, was like soaring into homes of angel-crowded space, sweeping

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI
The Double-Blossom Wild Cherry-Tree

through folded and on to folded white fountain-bow of wings, in innumerable columns: but the thought of it was no recovery of it; she might as well have striven to be a child. The sensation of happiness promised to be less short-lived in memory, and would have been, had not her present disease of the longing for happiness ravaged every corner of it for the secret of its existence. The reflection took root. 'He must be good . . .!' That reflection vowed to endure. Poor by comparison with what it displaced, it presented itself to her as conferring something on him, and she would not have had it absent though it robbed her.

She looked down. Vernon was dreamily looking up.

She plucked Crossjay hurriedly away, whispering that he had better not wake Mr. Whitford, and then she proposed to reverse their previous chase, and she be the hound and he the hare. Crossjay fetched a magnificent start. On his glancing behind he saw Miss Middleton walking listlessly, with a hand at her side.

'There's a regular girl!' said he, in some disgust; for his theory was, that girls always have something the matter with them to spoil a game.

CHAPTER XII

Miss Middleton and Mr. Vernon Whitford

Looking upward, not quite awakened out of a transient doze, at a fair head circled in dazzling blossom, one

Digitized by Google

may temporize awhile with common sense, and take it for a vision after the eyes have regained direction of the mind. Vernon did so until the plastic vision interwound with reallty alarmingly. This is the embrace of a Melusine who will soon have the brain if she is encouraged. Slight dalliance with her makes the very diminutive seem as big as life. He jumped to his feet, rattled his throat, planted firmness on his brows and mouth, and attacked the dream-giving earth with tremendous long strides, that his blood might be lively at the throne of understanding. Miss Middleton and young Crossjay were within hail: it was her face he had seen, and still the idea of a vision, chased from his reasonable wits, knocked hard and again for readmission. There was little for a man of humble mind toward the sex to think of in the fact of a young lady's bending rather low to peep at him asleep, except that the poise of her slender figure, between an air of spying and of listening, vividly recalled his likening of her to the Mountain Echo. Man or maid sleeping in the open air provokes your tip-toe curiosity. Men, it is known, have in that state cruelly been kissed; and no rights are bestowed on them, they are teased by a vapourish rapture; what has happened to them the poor fellows barely divine: they have a crazy step from that day. But a vision is not so distracting; it is our own, we can put it aside and return to it, play at rich and poor with it, and are not to be summoned before your laws and rules for secreting it in our treasury. Besides, it is the golden key of all the possible: new worlds expand beneath the dawn it brings us. Just outside reality, it illumines, enriches and softens real things;—and to desire it in pre-

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII
Miss Middleton and Mr. Vernon Whitford

ference to the simple fact, is a damning proof of enervation.

Such was Vernon's winding up of his brief drama of fantasy. He was aware of the fantastical element in him and soon had it under. Which of us who is of any worth is without it? He had not much vanity to trouble him, and passion was quiet, so his task was not gigantic. Especially be it remarked, that he was a man of quick pace, the sovereign remedy for the dispersing of the mental fen-mist. He had tried it and knew that nonsense is to be walked off.

Near the end of the park young Crossjay overtook him, and after acting the pumped one a trifle more than needful, cried: 'I say, Mr. Whitford, there 's Miss Middleton with her handkerchief out.'

'What for, my lad?' said Vernon.

'I'm sure I don't know. All of a sudden she bumped down. And, look what fellows girls are!—here she comes as if nothing had happened, and I saw her feel at her side.'

Clara was shaking her head to express a denial. 'I am not at all unwell,' she said when she came near. 'I guessed Crossjay's business in running up to you; he 's a good-for-nothing, officious boy. I was tired, and rested for a moment.'

Crossjay peered at her eyelids. Vernon looked away and said: 'Are you too tired for a stroll?'

'Not now.'

'Shall it be brisk?'

'You have the lead.'

He led at a swing of the legs that accelerated young Crossjay's to the double, but she with her short swift equal steps glided along easily on a line by his shoulder,

Digitized by Google

and he groaned to think that of all the girls of earth this one should have been chosen for the position of fine lady.

'You won't tire me,' said she, in answer to his look.

'You remind me of the little Piedmontese Bersaglieri on the march.'

'I have seen them trotting into Como from Milan.'

'They cover a quantity of ground in a day, if the ground 's flat. You want another sort of step for the mountains.'

'I should not attempt to dance up.'

'They soon tame romantic notions of them.'

'The mountains tame luxurious dreams, you mean. I see how they are conquered. I can plod. Anything to be high up!'

'Well, there you have the secret of good work: to plod on and still keep the passion fresh.'

'Yes, when we have an aim in view.'

'We always have one.'

'Captives have?'

'More than the rest of us.'

Ignorant man! What of wives miserably wedded? What aim in view have these most woeful captives? Horror shrouds it, and shame reddens through the folds to tell of innermost horror.

'Take me back to the mountains, if you please, Mr. Whitford,' Miss Middleton said, fallen out of sympathy with him. 'Captives have death in view, but that is not an aim.'

'Why may not captives expect a release?'

'Hardly from a tyrant.'

'If you are thinking of tyrants, it may be so. Say the tyrant dies?'

'The prison-gates are unlocked and out comes a

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII
Miss Middleton and Mr. Vernon Whitford

skeleton. But why will you talk of skeletons! The very name of mountain seems life in comparison with any other subject.'

'I assure you,' said Vernon, with the fervour of a man lighting on an actual truth in his conversation with a young lady, 'it's not the first time I have thought you would be at home in the Alps. You would walk and climb as well as you dance.'

She liked to hear Clara Middleton talked of, and of her having been thought of: and giving him friendly eyes, barely noticing that he was in a glow, she said, 'If you speak so encouragingly I shall fancy we are near an ascent.'

'I wish we were,' said he.

'We can realize it by dwelling on it, don't you think?'

'We can begin climbing.'

'Oh!' she squeezed herself shadowily.

'Which mountain shall it be?' said Vernon in the right real earnest tone.

Miss Middleton suggested a lady's mountain first, for a trial. 'And then, if you think well enough of me —if I have not stumbled more than twice, or asked more than ten times how far it is from the top, I should like to be promoted to scale a giant.'

They went up some of the lesser heights of Switzerland and Styria, and settled in South Tyrol, the young lady preferring this district for the strenuous exercise of her climbing powers because she loved Italian colour; and it seemed an exceedingly good reason to the genial imagination she had awakened in Mr. Whitford: 'Though,' said he abruptly, 'you are not so much Italian as French.'

She hoped she was English, she remarked.

Digitized by Google

'Of course you are English; . . . yes.' He moderated his assent with the halting affirmative.

She inquired wonderingly why he spoke in apparent hesitation.

'Well, you have French feet, for example: French wits; French impatience,' he lowered his voice, 'and charm.'

'And love of compliments.'

'Possibly. I was not conscious of paying them.'

'And a disposition to rebel?'

'To challenge authority, at least.'

'That is a dreadful character.'

'At all events it is a character.'

'Fit for an Alpine comrade?'

'For the best of comrades anywhere.'

'It is not a piece of drawing-room sculpture: that is the most one can say for it!' she dropped a dramatic sigh.

Had he been willing she would have continued the theme, for the pleasure a poor creature long gnawing her sensations finds in seeing herself from the outside. It fell away. After a silence, she could not renew it: and he was evidently indifferent, having to his own satisfaction dissected and stamped her a foreigner. With it passed her holiday. She had forgotten Sir Willoughby: she remembered him and said: 'You knew Miss Durham, Mr. Whitford.'

He answered briefly: 'I did.'

'Was she . . .?' some hot-faced inquiry peered forth and withdrew.

'Very handsome,' said Vernon.

'English?'

'Yes: the dashing style of English.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII
Miss Middleton and Mr. Vernon Whitford

'Very courageous.'

'I daresay she had a kind of courage.'

'She did very wrong.'

'I won't say no. She discovered a man more of a match with herself; luckily not too late. We're at the mercy . . .'

'Was she not unpardonable?'

'I should be sorry to think that of any one.'

'But you agree that she did wrong.'

'I suppose I do. She made a mistake and she corrected it. If she had not, she would have made a greater mistake.'

'The manner . . .'

'That was bad—as far as we know. The world has not much right to judge. A false start must now and then be made. It's better not to take notice of it, I think.'

'What is it we are at the mercy of?'

'Currents of feeling, our natures. I am the last man to preach on the subject: young ladies are enigmas to me; I fancy they must have a natural perception of the husband suitable to them, and the reverse; and if they have a certain degree of courage, it follows that they please themselves.'

'They are not to reflect on the harm they do?' said Miss Middleton.

'By all means let them reflect; they hurt nobody by doing that.'

'But a breach of faith!'

'If the faith can be kept through life, all's well.'

'And then there is the cruelty, the injury!'

'I really think that if a young lady came to me to inform me she must break our engagement—I have

Digitized by Google

never been put to the proof, but to suppose it:—I should not think her cruel.'

'Then she would not be much of a loss.'

'And I should not think so for this reason, that it is impossible for a girl to come to such a resolution without previously showing signs of it to her . . . the man she is engaged to. I think it unfair to engage a girl for longer than a week or two, just time enough for her preparations and publications.'

'If he is always intent on himself, signs are likely to be unheeded by him,' said Miss Middleton.

He did not answer, and she said quickly:

'It must always be a cruelty. The world will think so. It is an act of inconstancy.'

'If they knew one another well before they were engaged.'

'Are you not singularly tolerant?' said she.

To which Vernon replied with airy cordiality:

'In some cases it is right to judge by results; we'll leave severity to the historian, who is bound to be a professional moralist and put pleas of human nature out of the scales. The lady in question may have been to blame, but no hearts were broken, and here we have four happy instead of two miserable.'

His persecuting geniality of countenance appealed to her to confirm this judgement by results, and she nodded and said, 'Four,' as the awe-stricken speak.

From that moment until young Crossjay fell into the green-rutted lane from a tree, and was got on his legs half-stunned, with a hanging lip and a face like the inside of a flayed eel-skin, she might have been walking in the desert, and alone, for the pleasure she had in society.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII
Miss Middleton and Mr. Vernon Whitford

They led the fated lad home between them, singularly drawn together by their joint ministrations to him, in which her delicacy had to stand fire, and sweet good nature made naught of any trial. They were hand in hand with the little fellow as physician and professional nurse.

CHAPTER XIII

The First Effort after Freedom

Crossjay's accident was only another proof, as Vernon told Miss Dale, that the boy was but half monkey.

'Something fresh?' she exclaimed on seeing him brought into the Hall, where she had just arrived.

'Simply a continuation,' said Vernon. 'He is not so prehensile as he should be. He probably in extremity relies on the tail that has been docked. Are you a man, Crossjay?'

'I should think I was!' Crossjay replied with an old man's voice, and a ghastly twitch for a smile overwhelmed the compassionate ladies.

Miss Dale took possession of him. 'You err in the other direction,' she remarked to Vernon.

'But a little bracing roughness is better than spoiling him,' said Miss Middleton.

She did not receive an answer, and she thought, 'Whatever Willoughby does is right, to this lady!'

Clara's impression was renewed when Sir Willoughby sat beside Miss Dale in the evening; and certainly she had never seen him shine so picturesquely as in his bearing with Miss Dale. The

Digitized by Google

sprightly sallies of the two, their rallyings, their laughter, and her fine eyes, and his handsome gestures, won attention like a fencing match of a couple keen with the foils to display the mutual skill. And it was his design that she should admire the display; he was anything but obtuse; enjoying the match as he did and necessarily did to act so excellent a part in it, he meant the observer to see the man he was with a lady not of raw understanding. So it went on from day to day for three days.

She fancied once that she detected the agreeable stirring of the brood of jealousy, and found it neither in her heart nor in her mind, but in the book of wishes, well known to the young, where they write matter which may sometimes be independent of both those volcanic albums. Jealousy would have been a relief to her, a dear devil's aid. She studied the complexion of jealousy to delude herself with the sense of the spirit being in her, and all the while she laughed, as at a vile theatre whereof the imperfection of the stage machinery rather than the performance is the wretched source of amusement.

Vernon had deeply depressed her. She was hunted by the figure 4. *Four happy instead of two miserable.* He had said it, involving her among the four; and so it must be, she considered, and she must be as happy as she could; for not only was he incapable of perceiving her state, he was unable to imagine other circumstances to surround her. How, to be just to him, were they imaginable by him or any one?

Her horrible isolation of secresy in a world amiable in unsuspectingness, frightened her. To fling away her secret, to conform, to be unrebellious, uncritical,

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII
The First Effort after Freedom

submissive, became an impatient desire; and the task did not appear so difficult since Miss Dale's arrival. Endearments had been rarer, more formal; living bodily untroubled and unashamed, and, as she phrased it, having no one to care for her, she turned insensibly in the direction where she was due; she slightly imitated Miss Dale's colloquial responsiveness. To tell truth, she felt vivacious in a moderate way with Willoughby after seeing him with Miss Dale. Liberty wore the aspect of a towering prison-wall; the desperate undertaking of climbing one side and dropping to the other was more than she, unaided, could resolve on; consequently, as no one cared for her, a worthless creature might as well cease dreaming and stipulating for the fulfilment of her dreams; she might as well yield to her fate: nay, make the best of it.

Sir Willoughby was flattered and satisfied. Clara's adopted vivacity proved his thorough knowledge of feminine nature; nor did her feebleness in sustaining it displease him. A steady look of hers had of late perplexed the man, and he was comforted by signs of her inefficiency where he excelled. The effort and the failure were both of good omen.

But she could not continue the effort. He had overweighted her too much for the mimicry of a sentiment to harden and have an apparently natural place among her impulses; and now an idea came to her that he might, it might be hoped, possibly see in Miss Dale, by present contrast, the mate he sought; by contrast with an unanswering creature like herself, he might perhaps realize in Miss Dale's greater accomplishments and her devotion to him the merit of suita-

Digitized by Google

bility; he might be induced to do her justice. Dim as the loophole was, Clara fixed her mind on it till it gathered light. And as a prelude to action, she plunged herself into a state of such profound humility, that to accuse it of being simulated would be venturesome, though it was not positive. The tempers of the young are liquid fires in isles of quicksand; the precious metals not yet cooled in a solid earth. Her compassion for Lætitia was less forced; but really she was almost as earnest in her self-abasement, for she had not latterly been brilliant, not even adequate to the ordinary requirements of conversation. She had no courage, no wit, no diligence, nothing that she could distinguish save discontentment like a corroding acid, and she went so far in sincerity as with a curious shift of feeling to pity the man plighted to her. If it suited her purpose to pity Sir Willoughby, she was not moved by policy, be assured; her needs were her nature, her moods her mind; she had the capacity to make anything serve her by passing into it with the glance which discerned its usefulness; and this is how it is that the young when they are in trouble, without approaching the elevation of scientific hypocrites, can teach that able class lessons in hypocrisy.

'Why should not Willoughby be happy,' she said; and the explanation was pushed forth by the second thought: 'Then I shall be free!' Still that thought came second.

The desire for the happiness of Willoughby was fervent on his behalf, and wafted her far from friends and letters to a narrow Tyrolean valley, where a shallow river ran, with the indentations of a remotely-seen army of winding ranks in column, topaz over

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII
The First Effort after Freedom

the pebbles, to hollows of ravishing emerald. There sat Liberty, after her fearful leap over the prison-wall, at peace to watch the water and the falls of sunshine on the mountain above, between descending pine-stem shadows. Clara's wish for his happiness, as soon as she had housed herself in the imagination of her freedom, was of a purity that made it seem exceedingly easy for her to speak to him.

The opportunity was offered by Sir Willoughby. Every morning after breakfast, Miss Dale walked across the park to see her father, and on this occasion Sir Willoughby and Miss Middleton went with her as far as the lake, all three discoursing of the beauty of various trees, birches, aspens, poplars, beeches, then in their new green. Miss Dale loved the aspen, Miss Middleton the beech, Sir Willoughby the birch, and pretty things were said by each in praise of the favoured object, particularly by Miss Dale. So much so that when she had gone on he recalled one of her remarks, and said: 'I believe, if the whole place were swept away to-morrow, Lætitia Dale could reconstruct it, and put those aspens on the north of the lake in number and situation correctly where you have them now. I would guarantee her description of it in absence correct.'

'Why should she be absent?' said Clara, palpitating.

'Well, why!' returned Sir Willoughby. 'As you say, there is no reason why. The art of life, and mine will be principally a country life—town is not life, but a tornado whirling atoms—the art is to associate a group of sympathetic friends in our neighbourhood; and it is a fact worth noting that if ever I feel tired

Digitized by Google

of the place, a short talk with Lætitia Dale refreshes it more than a month or two on the Continent. She has the well of enthusiasm. And there is a great advantage in having a cultivated person at command, with whom one can chat of any topic under the sun. I repeat, you have no need of town if you have friends like Lætitia Dale within call. My mother esteemed her highly.'

'Willoughby, she is not obliged to go.'

'I hope not. And, my love, I rejoice that you have taken to her. Her father's health is poor. She would be a young spinster to live alone in a country cottage.'

'What of your scheme?'

'Old Vernon is a very foolish fellow.'

'He has declined?'

'Not a word on the subject! I have only to propose it to be snubbed, I know.'

'You may not be aware how you throw him into the shade with her.'

'Nothing seems to teach him the art of dialogue with ladies.'

'Are not gentlemen shy when they see themselves outshone?'

'He hasn't it, my love: Vernon is deficient in the lady's tongue.'

'I respect him for that.'

'Outshone, you say? I do not know of any shining —save to one, who lights me, path and person!'

The identity of the one was conveyed to her in a bow and a soft pressure.

'Not only has he not the lady's tongue, which I hold to be a man's proper accomplishment,' continued

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII
The First Effort after Freedom

Sir Willoughby, 'he cannot turn his advantages to account. Here has Miss Dale been with him now four days in the house. They are exactly on the same footing as when she entered it. You ask? I will tell you. It is this: it is want of warmth. Old Vernon is a scholar—and a fish. Well, perhaps he has cause to be shy of matrimony: but he is a fish.'

'You are reconciled to his leaving you?'

'False alarm! The resolution to do anything unaccustomed is quite beyond old Vernon.'

'But if Mr. Oxford—Whitford . . . your swans coming sailing up the lake, how beautiful they look when they are indignant! I was going to ask you, surely men witnessing a marked admiration for some one else will naturally be discouraged?'

Sir Willoughby stiffened with sudden enlightenment. Though the word jealousy had not been spoken, the drift of her observations was clear. Smiling inwardly, he said: and the sentences were not enigmas to her: 'Surely, too, young ladies . . . a little?—Too far? But an old friendship! About the same as the fitting of an old glove to a hand. Hand and glove have only to meet. Where there is natural harmony you would not have discord. Ay, but you have it if you check the harmony. My dear girl! You child!'

He had actually, in this parabolic and commendable obscureness, for which she thanked him in her soul, struck the very point she had not named and did not wish to hear named, but wished him to strike. His exultation, of the compressed sort, was extreme, on hearing her cry out:

'Young ladies may be. Oh! not I, not I. I can convince you. Not that. Believe me, Willoughby.

Digitized by Google

I do not know what it is to feel that, or anything like it. I cannot conceive a claim on any one's life—as a claim: or the continuation of an engagement not founded on perfect, *perfect* sympathy. How should I feel it, then? It is, as you say of Mr. Ox—Whitford, beyond me.'

Sir Willoughby caught up the Ox—Whitford.

Bursting with laughter in his joyful pride, he called it a portrait of old Vernon in society. For she thought a trifle too highly of Vernon, as here and there a raw young lady does think of the friends of her plighted man: which is waste of substance properly belonging to him: as it were, in the loftier sense, an expenditure in genuflexions to wayside idols of the reverence she should bring intact to the temple. Derision instructs her.

Of the other subject—her jealousy—he had no desire to hear more. She had winced: the woman had been touched to smarting in the girl: enough. She attempted the subject once, but faintly, and his careless parrying threw her out. Clara could have bitten her tongue for that reiterated stupid slip on the name of Whitford; and because she was innocent at heart she persisted in asking herself how she could be guilty of it.

'You both know the botanic titles of these wild-flowers,' she said.

'Who?' he inquired.

'You and Miss Dale.'

Sir Willoughby shrugged. He was amused.

'No woman on earth will grace a barouche so exquisitely as my Clara!'

'Where?' said she.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII
The First Effort after Freedom

'During our annual two months in London. I drive a barouche there, and venture to prophesy that my equipage will create the greatest excitement of any in London. I see old Horace de Craye gazing!'

She sighed. She could not drag him to the word, or a hint of it necessary to her subject.

But there it was; she saw it. She had nearly let it go, and blushed at being obliged to name it.

'Jealousy, do you mean, Willoughby? the people in London would be jealous?—Colonel de Craye? How strange! That is a sentiment I cannot understand.'

Sir Willoughby gesticulated the 'Of course not' of an established assurance to the contrary.

'Indeed, Willoughby, I do not.'

'Certainly not.'

He was now in her trap. And he was imagining himself to be anatomizing her feminine nature.

'Can I give you a proof, Willoughby? I am so utterly incapable of it that—listen to me—were you to come to me to tell me, as you might, how much better suited to you Miss Dale has appeared than I am—and I fear I am not; it should be spoken plainly; unsuited altogether, perhaps—I would, I beseech you to believe—you must believe me—give you . . . give you your freedom instantly; most truly; and engage to speak of you as I should think of you. Willoughby, you would have no one to praise you in public and in private as I should, for you would be to me the most honest, truthful, chivalrous gentleman alive. And in that case I would undertake to declare that she would not admire you more than I: Miss Dale would not; she would not admire you more than I; not even Miss Dale!'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII
The First Effort after Freedom

This, her first direct leap for liberty, set Clara panting, and so much had she to say that the nervous and the intellectual halves of her clashed like cymbals, dazing and stunning her with the appositeness of things to be said, and dividing her in indecision as to the cunningest to move him, of the many pressing.

The condition of feminine jealousy stood revealed.

He had driven her farther than he intended.

'Come, let me allay these . . .' he soothed her with hand and voice while seeking for his phrase; 'these magnified pin-points. Now, my Clara! on my honour! and when I put it forward in attestation, my honour has the most serious meaning speech can have; ordinarily my word has to suffice for bonds, promises or asseverations: on my honour! not merely is there, my poor child! no ground of suspicion, I assure you, I declare to you, the fact of the case is the very reverse. Now, mark me; of her sentiments I cannot pretend to speak; I did not, to my knowledge, originate, I am not responsible for them, and I am, before the law, as we will say, ignorant of them: that is, I have never heard a declaration of them, and I am, therefore, under pain of the stigma of excessive fatuity, bound to be non-cognizant. But as to myself, I can speak for myself, and, on my honour! Clara—to be as direct as possible, even to baldness, and you know I loathe it—I could not, I repeat, *I could not marry Lætitia Dale!* Let me impress it on you. No flatteries—we are all susceptible more or less—no conceivable condition could bring it about; no amount of admiration. She and I are excellent friends; we cannot be more. When you see us together, the natural concord of our

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII
The First Effort after Freedom

minds is of course misleading. She is a woman of genius. I do not conceal, I profess my admiration of her. There are times when, I confess, I require a Lætitia Dale to bring me out, give and take. I am indebted to her for the enjoyment of the duet few know, few can accord with, fewer still are allowed the privilege of playing with a human being. I am indebted, I own, and I feel deep gratitude; I own to a lively friendship for Miss Dale, but if she is displeasing in the sight of my bride by . . . by the breadth of an eyelash, then . . .'

Sir Willoughby's arm waved Miss Dale off away into outer darkness in the wilderness.

Clara shut her eyes and rolled her eyeballs in a frenzy of unuttered revolt.

But she was not engaged in the colloquy to be an advocate of Miss Dale or of common humanity.

'Ah!' she said, simply determining that the subject should not drop.

'And, ah!' he mocked her tenderly. 'True, though! And who knows better than my Clara that I require youth, health, beauty, and the other undefinable attributes fitting with mine and beseeming the station of the lady called to preside over my household and represent me? What says my other self? my fairer? But you are! my love, you are! Understand my nature rightly, and you . . .'

'I do! I do!' interposed Clara: 'if I did not by this time I should be idiotic. Let me assure you, I understand it. Oh! listen to me: one moment. Miss Dale regards me as the happiest woman on earth. Willoughby, if I possessed her good qualities, her heart and mind, no doubt I should be. It is my wish

Digitized by Google

—you must hear me, hear me out—my wish, my earnest wish, my burning prayer, my wish to make way for her. She appreciates you: I do not—to my shame, I do not. She worships you: I do not, I cannot. You are the rising sun to her. It has been so for years. No one can account for love: I daresay not for the impossibility of loving . . . loving where we should; all love bewilders me. I was not created to understand it. But she loves you, she has pined. I believe it has destroyed the health you demand as one item in your list. But you, Willoughby, can restore that. Travelling, and . . . and your society, the pleasure of your society would certainly restore it. You look so handsome together! She has unbounded devotion: as for me I cannot idolize. I see faults; I see them daily. They astonish and wound me. Your pride would not bear to hear them spoken of, least of all by your wife. You warned me to beware—that is, you said, you said something.'

Her busy brain missed the subterfuge to cover her slip of the tongue.

Sir Willoughby struck in: 'And when I say that the entire concatenation is based on an erroneous observation of facts, and an erroneous deduction from that erroneous observation!—? No, no. Have confidence in me. I propose it to you in this instance, purely to save you from deception. You are cold, my love? you shivered.'

'I am not cold,' said Clara. 'Some one, I suppose, was walking over my grave.'

The gulf of a caress hove in view like an enormous billow hollowing under the curled ridge.

She stooped to a buttercup; the monster swept by.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII
The First Effort after Freedom

'Your grave!' he exclaimed over her head; 'my own girl!'

'Is not the orchis naturally a stranger in ground so far away from the chalk, Willoughby?'

'I am incompetent to pronounce an opinion on such important matters. My mother had a passion for every description of flower. I fancy I have some recollection of her scattering the flower you mention over the park.'

'If she were living now!'

'We should be happy in the blessing of the most estimable of women, my Clara.'

'She would have listened to me. She would have realized what I mean.'

'Indeed, Clara—poor soul!' he murmured to himself aloud: 'indeed you are absolutely in error. If I have seemed—but I repeat, you are deceived. The idea of "fitness" is a total hallucination. Supposing you—I do it even in play painfully—entirely out of the way, unthought of . . .'

'Extinct,' Clara said low.

'Non-existent for me,' he selected a preferable term. 'Suppose it; I should still, in spite of an admiration I have never thought it incumbent on me to conceal, still be—I speak emphatically—*utterly incapable of the offer of my hand to Miss Dale.* It may be that she is embedded in my mind as a friend, and nothing but a friend. I received the stamp in early youth. People have noticed it—we do, it seems, bring one another out, reflecting, counter-reflecting.'

She glanced up at him with a shrewd satisfaction to see that her wicked shaft had stuck.

'You do: it is a common remark,' she said. 'The

Digitized by Google

instantaneous difference when she comes near, any one might notice.'

'My love,' he opened the iron gate into the garden, 'you encourage the naughty little suspicion.'

'But it is a beautiful sight, Willoughby. I like to see you together. I like it as I like to see colours match.'

'Very well. There is no harm, then. We shall often be together. I like my fair friend. But the instant!—you have only to express a sentiment of disapprobation.'

'And you dismiss her.'

'I dismiss her. That is, as to the word, I constitute myself your echo, to clear any vestige of suspicion. She goes.'

'That is a case of a person doomed to extinction without offending.'

'Not without: for whoever offends my bride, my wife, my sovereign lady, offends me: very deeply offends me.'

'Then the caprices of your wife . . .' Clara stamped her foot imperceptibly on the lawn-sward, which was irresponsibly soft to her fretfulness. She broke from the inconsequent meaningless mild tone of irony, and said: 'Willoughby, women have their honour to swear by equally with men:—girls have: they have to swear an oath at the altar: may I to you now? Take it for uttered when I tell you that nothing would make me happier than your union with Miss Dale. I have spoken as much as I can. Tell me you release me.'

With the well-known screw-smile of duty upholding weariness worn to inanition, he rejoined: 'Allow me once more to reiterate, that it is repulsive, inconceiv-

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII
The First Effort after Freedom

able, that I should *ever, under any mortal conditions, bring myself to the point of taking Miss Dale for my wife.* You reduce me to this perfectly childish protestation —pitiably childish! But, my love, have I to remind you that you and I are plighted, and that I am an honourable man?'

'I know it, I feel it, release me!' cried Clara.

Sir Willoughby severely reprehended his short-sightedness for seeing but the one proximate object in the particular attention he had bestowed on Miss Dale. He could not disavow that they had been marked, and with an object, and he was distressed by the unwonted want of wisdom through which he had been drawn to overshoot his object. His design to excite a touch of the insane emotion in Clara's bosom was too successful, and, 'I was not thinking of her,' he said to himself in his candour, contrite.

She cried again: 'Will you not, Willoughby?—release me?'

He begged her to take his arm.

To consent to touch him while petitioning for a detachment, appeared discordant to Clara, but, if she expected him to accede, it was right that she should do as much as she could, and she surrendered her hand at arm's length, disdaining the imprisoned fingers. He pressed them and said: 'Doctor Middleton is in the library. I see Vernon is at work with Crossjay in the West-room—the boy has had sufficient for the day. Now, is it not like old Vernon to drive his books at a cracked head before it 's half mended?'

He signalled to young Crossjay, who was up and out through the folding windows in a twinkling.

'And you will go in, and talk to Vernon of the lady

Digitized by Google

in question,' Sir Willoughby whispered to Clara. 'Use your best persuasions in our joint names. You have my warrant for saying that money is no consideration; house and income are assured. You can hardly have taken me seriously when I requested you to undertake Vernon before. I was quite in earnest then as now. I prepare Miss Dale. I will not have a wedding on *our* wedding-day: but either before or after it, I gladly speed their alliance. I think now I give you the best proof possible; and though I know that with women a delusion may be seen to be groundless and still be cherished, I rely on your good sense.'

Vernon was at the window and stood aside for her to enter. Sir Willoughby used a gentle insistance with her. She bent her head as if she were stepping into a cave. So frigid was she, that a ridiculous dread of calling Mr. Whitford Mr. Oxford was her only present anxiety when Sir Willoughby had closed the window on them.

CHAPTER XIV

Sir Willoughby and Lætitia

'I prepare Miss Dale.'

Sir Willoughby thought of his promise to Clara. He trifled a while with young Crossjay, and then sent the boy flying, and wrapped himself in meditation. So shall you see standing many a statue of statesmen who have died in harness for their country.

In the hundred and fourth chapter of the thirteenth volume of the Book of Egoism, it is written: *Possession*

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIV
Sir Willoughby and Laetitia

without obligation to the object possessed approaches felicity.

It is the rarest condition of ownership. For example: the possession of land is not without obligation both to the soil and the tax-collector; the possession of fine clothing is oppressed by obligation: gold, jewelry, works of art, enviable household furniture, are positive fetters: the possession of a wife we find surcharged with obligation. In all these cases, possession is a gentle term for enslavement, bestowing the sort of felicity attained to by the helot drunk. You can have the joy, the pride, the intoxication of possession: you can have no free soul.

But there is one instance of possession, and that the most perfect, which leaves us free, under not a shadow of obligation, receiving ever, never giving, or if giving, giving only of our waste; as it were (sauf votre respect), by form of perspiration, radiation, if you like; unconscious poral bountifulness; and it is a beneficial process for the system. Our possession of an adoring female's worship, is this instance.

The soft cherishable Parsee is hardly at any season other than prostrate. She craves nothing save that you continue in being—her sun: which is your firm constitutional endeavour: and thus you have a most exact alliance; she supplying spirit to your matter, while at the same time presenting matter to your spirit, verily a comfortable apposition. The Gods do bless it.

That they do so indeed is evident in the men they select for such a felicitous crown and aureole. Weak men would be rendered nervous by the flattery of a woman's worship; or they would be for returning it,

Digitized by Google

at least partially, as though it could be bandied to and fro without emulgence of the poetry; or they would be pitiful, and quite spoil the thing. Some would be for transforming the beautiful solitary vestal flame by the first effort of the multiplication-table into your hearth-fire of slippered affection. So these men are not they whom the Gods have ever selected, but rather men of a pattern with themselves, very high and very solid men, who maintain the crown by holding divinely independent of the great emotion they have sown.

Even for them a pass of danger is ahead, as we shall see in our sample of one among the highest of them.

A clear approach to felicity had long been the portion of Sir Willoughby Patterne in his relations with Lætitia Dale. She belonged to him; he was quite unshackled by her. She was everything that is good in a parasite, nothing that is bad. His dedicated critic she was, reviewing him with a favour equal to perfect efficiency in her office; and whatever the world might say of him, to her the happy gentleman could constantly turn for his refreshing balsamic bath. She flew to the soul in him, pleasingly arousing sensations of that inhabitant; and he allowed her the right to fly, in the manner of kings, as we have heard, consenting to the privileges acted on by cats. These may not address their Majesties, but they may stare; nor will it be contested that the attentive circular eyes of the humble domestic creatures are an embellishment to Royal pomp and grandeur, such truly as should one day gain for them an inweaving and figurement—in the place of bees, ermine tufts, and their various present decorations — upon the august great robes back-flowing and foaming over the gaspy page-boys.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIV
Sir Willoughby and Lætitia

Further to quote from the same volume of THE BOOK: *There is pain in the surrendering of that we are fain to relinquish.*

The idea is too exquisitely attenuate, as are those of the whole body-guard of the heart of Egoism, and will slip through you unless you shall have made a study of the gross of volumes of the first and second sections of THE BOOK, and that will take you up to senility; or you must make a personal entry into the pages, perchance; or an escape out of them. There was once a venerable gentleman for whom a white hair grew on the cop of his nose, laughing at removals. He resigned himself to it in the end, and lastingly contemplated the apparition. It does not concern us what effect was produced on his countenance and his mind; enough that he saw a fine thing, but not so fine as the idea cited above; which has been between the two eyes of humanity ever since women were sought in marriage. With yonder old gentleman it may have been a ghostly hair or a disease of the optic nerves; but for us it is a real growth, and humanity might profitably imitate him in his patient speculation upon it.

Sir Willoughby Patterne, though ready in the pursuit of duty and policy (an oft-united couple) to cast Miss Dale away, had to consider that he was not simply, so to speak, casting her over a hedge, he was casting her for a man to catch her; and this was a much greater trial than it had been on the previous occasion, when she went over bump to the ground. In the arms of a husband, there was no knowing how soon she might forget her soul's fidelity. It had not hurt him to sketch the project of the conjunction;

Digitized by Google

benevolence assisted him; but he winced and smarted on seeing it take shape. It sullied his idea of Lætitia.

Still, if, in spite of so great a change in her fortune, her spirit could be guaranteed changeless, he, for the sake of pacifying his bride, and to keep two serviceable persons near him at command, might resolve to join them. The vision of his resolution brought with it a certain pallid contempt of the physically faithless woman; no wonder he betook himself to The Book, and opened it on the scorching chapters treating of the sex, and the execrable wiles of that foremost creature of the chase, who runs for life. She is not spared in the Biggest of Books. But close it.

The writing in it having been done chiefly by men, men naturally receive their fortification from its wisdom, and half a dozen of the popular sentences for the confusion of women (cut in brass worn to a polish like sombre gold), refreshed Sir Willoughby for his undertaking.

An examination of Lætitia's faded complexion braced him very cordially.

His Clara jealous of this poor leaf!

He could have desired the transfusion of a quality or two from Lætitia to his bride; but you cannot, as in cookery, obtain a mixture of the essences of these creatures; and if, as it is possible to do, and as he had been doing recently with the pair of them at the Hall, you stew them in one pot, you are far likelier to intensify their little birth-marks of individuality. Had they a tendency to excellence, it might be otherwise; they might then make the exchanges we wish for; or scientifically concocted in a harem for a sufficient length of time by a sultan anything but

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIV
Sir Willoughby and Lætitia

obtuse, they might. It is however fruitless to dwell on what was only a glimpse of a wild regret, like the crossing of two express trains along the rails in Sir Willoughby's head.

The ladies Eleanor and Isabel were sitting with Miss Dale, all three at work on embroideries. He had merely to look at Miss Eleanor. She rose. She looked at Miss Isabel, and rattled her châtelaine to account for her departure. After a decent interval Miss Isabel glided out. Such was the perfect discipline of the household.

Sir Willoughby played an air on the knee of his crossed leg.

Lætitia grew conscious of a meaning in the silence. She said, 'You have not been vexed by affairs to-day?'

'Affairs,' he replied, 'must be peculiarly vexatious to trouble me. Concerning the country or my personal affairs?'

'I fancy I was alluding to the country.'

'I trust I am as good a patriot as any man living,' said he; 'but I am used to the follies of my countrymen, and we are on board a stout ship. At the worst it's no worse than a rise in rates and taxes; soup at the Hall-gates, perhaps; licence to fell timber in one of the outer copses, or some dozen loads of coal. You hit my feudalism.'

'The knight in armour has gone,' said Lætitia, 'and the castle with the drawbridge. Immunity for our island has gone too since we took to commerce.'

'We bartered independence for commerce. You hit our old controversy. Ay, but we do not want this overgrown population! However, we will put politics and sociology and the pack of their modern barbarous

Digitized by Google

words aside. You read me intuitively. I have been, I will not say annoyed, but ruffled. I have much to do, and going into Parliament would make me almost helpless if I lose Vernon. You know of some absurd notion he has?—literary fame, and bachelor's chambers, and a chop-house, and the rest of it.'

She knew; and thinking differently in the matter of literary fame, she flushed, and ashamed of the flush, frowned.

He bent over to her with the perusing earnestness of a gentleman about to trifle.

'You cannot intend that frown?'

'Did I frown?'

'You do.'

'Now?'

'Fiercely.'

'Oh!'

'Will you smile to reassure me?'

'Willingly, as well as I can.'

A gloom overcame him. With no woman on earth did he shine so as to recall to himself seigneur and dame of the old French Court, as he did with Lætitia Dale. He did not wish the period revived, but reserved it as a garden to stray into when he was in the mood for displaying elegance and brightness in the society of a lady; and in speech Lætitia helped him to the nice delusion. She was not devoid of grace of bearing either.

Would she preserve her beautiful responsiveness to his ascendency? Hitherto she had, and for years, and quite fresh. But how of her as a married woman? Our souls are hideously subject to the conditions of our animal nature! A wife, possibly mother, it was

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIV
Sir Willoughby and Lætitia

within sober calculation that there would be great changes in her. And the hint of any change appeared a total change to one of the lofty order who, when they are called on to relinquish possession instead of aspiring to it, say, All or nothing!

Well, but if there was danger of the marriage-tie effecting the slightest alteration of her character or habit of mind, wherefore press it upon a tolerably hardened spinster!

Besides, though he did once put her hand in Vernon's for the dance, he remembered acutely that the injury then done by his generosity to his tender sensitiveness had sickened and tarnished the effulgence of two or three successive anniversaries of his coming of age. Nor had he altogether yet got over the passion of greed for the whole group of the well-favoured of the fair sex, which in his early youth had made it bitter for him to submit to the fickleness, not to say immodest fickleness, of any handsome one of them in yielding her hand to a man and suffering herself to be led away. Ladies whom he had only heard of as ladies of some beauty, incurred his wrath for having lovers or taking husbands. He was of a vast embrace; and do not exclaim, in covetousness;—for well he knew that even under Moslem law he could not have them all;—but as the enamoured custodian of the sex's purity, that blushes at such big spots as lovers and husbands; and it was unbearable to see it sacrificed for others. Without their purity what are they! —what are fruiterer's plums?—unsaleable. O for the bloom on them!

'As I said, I lose my right hand in Vernon,' he resumed, 'and I am, it seems, inevitably to lose him,

Digitized by Google

unless we contrive to fasten him down here. I think, my dear Miss Dale, you have my character. At least, I should recommend my future biographer to you—with a caution, of course. You would have to write selfishness with a dash under it. I cannot endure to lose a member of my household—not under any circumstances; and a change of feeling to me on the part of any of my friends because of marriage, I think hard. I would ask you, how can it be for Vernon's good to quit an easy pleasant home for the wretched profession of Literature?—wretchedly paying, I mean,' he bowed to the authoress. 'Let him leave the house, if he imagines he will not harmonize with its young mistress. He is queer, though a good fellow. But he ought, in that event, to have an establishment. And my scheme for Vernon—men, Miss Dale, do not change to their old friends when they marry—my scheme, which would cause the alteration in his system of life to be barely perceptible, is to build him a poetical little cottage, large enough for a couple, on the borders of my park. I have the spot in my eye. The point is, can he live alone there? Men, I say, do not change. How is it that we cannot say the same of women?'

Lætitia remarked: 'The generic woman appears to have an extraordinary faculty for swallowing the individual.'

'As to the individual, as to a particular person, I may be wrong. Precisely because it is her case I think of, my strong friendship inspires the fear: unworthy of both, no doubt, but trace it to the source. Even pure friendship, such is the taint in us, knows a kind of jealousy; though I would gladly

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIV
Sir Willoughby and Lætitia

see her established, and near me, happy and contributing to my happiness with her incomparable social charm. Her I do not estimate generically, be sure.'

'If you do me the honour to allude to me, Sir Willoughby,' said Lætitia, 'I am my father's housemate.'

'What wooer would take that for a refusal? He would beg to be a third in the house and a sharer of your affectionate burden. Honestly, why not? And I may be arguing against my own happiness: it may be the end of me!'

'The end?'

'Old friends are captious, exacting. No, not the end. Yet if my friend is not the same to me, it is the end to that form of friendship: not to the degree possibly. But when one is used to the form! And do you, in its application to friendship, scorn the word "use"? We are creatures of custom. I am, I confess, a poltroon in my affections; I dread changes. The shadow of the tenth of an inch in the customary elevation of an eyelid!—to give you an idea of my susceptibility. And, my dear Miss Dale, I throw myself on your charity, with all my weakness bare, let me add, as I could do to none but you. Consider, then, if I lose you! The fear is due to my pusillanimity entirely. High-souled women may be wives, mothers, and still reserve that home for their friend. They can and will conquer the viler conditions of human life. Our states, I have always contended, our various phases have to be passed through, and there is no disgrace in it so long as they do not levy toll on the quintessential,

Digitized by Google

the spiritual element. You understand me? I am no adept in these abstract elucidations.'

'You explain yourself clearly,' said Lætitia.

'I have never pretended that psychology was my forte,' said he, feeling overshadowed by her cold commendation: he was not less acutely sensitive to the fractional divisions of tones than of eyelids, being as it were, a melody with which everything was out of tune that did not modestly or mutely accord; and to bear about a melody in your person is incomparably more searching than the best of touchstones and talismans ever invented. 'Your father's health has improved latterly?'

'He did not complain of his health when I saw him this morning. My cousin Amelia is with him, and she is an excellent nurse.'

'He has a liking for Vernon.'

'He has a great respect for Mr. Whitford.'

'You have?'

'Oh! yes; I have it equally.'

'For a foundation, that is the surest. I would have the friends dearest to me begin on that. The headlong match is!—how can we describe it? By its finale, I am afraid. Vernon's abilities are really to be respected. His shyness is his malady. I suppose he reflected that he was not a capitalist. He might, one would think, have addressed himself to me; my purse is not locked.'

'No, Sir Willoughby!' Lætitia said warmly, for his donations in charity were famous.

Her eyes gave him the food he enjoyed, and basking in them, he continued:

'Vernon's income would at once have been regulated

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIV
Sir Willoughby and Lætitia

commensurately with a new position requiring an increase. This money, money, money! But the world will have it so. Happily I have inherited habits of business and personal economy. Vernon is a man who would do fifty times more with a companion appreciating his abilities and making light of his little deficiencies. They are palpable, small enough. He has always been aware of my wishes:—when perhaps the fulfilment might have sent me off on another tour of the world, home-bird though I am! When was it that our friendship commenced? In my boyhood, I know. Very many years back.'

'I am in my thirtieth year,' said Lætitia.

Surprised and pained by a baldness resembling the deeds of ladies (they have been known, either through absence of mind, or mania, to displace a wig) in the deadly intimacy which slaughters poetic admiration, Sir Willoughby punished her by deliberately reckoning that she did not look less.

'Genius,' he observed, 'is unacquainted with wrinkles': hardly one of his prettiest speeches; but he had been wounded, and he never could recover immediately. Coming on him in a mood of sentiment, the wound was sharp. He could very well have calculated the lady's age. It was the jarring clash of her brazen declaration of it upon his low rich flute-notes that shocked him.

He glanced at the gold cathedral-clock on the mantelpiece, and proposed a stroll on the lawn before dinner. Lætitia gathered up her embroidery work.

'As a rule,' he said, 'authoresses are not needlewomen.'

Digitized by Google

'I shall resign the needle or the pen if it stamps me an exception,' she replied.

He attempted a compliment on her truly exceptional character. As when the player's finger rests in distraction on the organ, it was without measure and disgusted his own hearing. Nevertheless she had been so good as to diminish his apprehension that the marriage of a lady in her thirtieth year with his cousin Vernon would be so much of a loss to him; hence, while parading the lawn, now and then casting an eye at the window of the room where his Clara and Vernon were in council, the schemes he indulged for his prospective comfort and his feelings of the moment were in such striving harmony as that to which we hear orchestral musicians bringing their instruments under the process called tuneing. It is not perfect, but it promises to be so soon. We are not angels, which have their dulcimers ever on the choral pitch. We are mortals, attaining the celestial accord with effort, through a stage of pain. Some degree of pain was necessary to Sir Willoughby, otherwise he would not have seen his generosity confronting him. He grew, therefore, tenderly inclined to Lætitia once more, so far as to say within himself, 'For conversation she would be a valuable wife.' And this valuable wife he was presenting to his cousin.

Apparently, considering the duration of the conference of his Clara and Vernon, his cousin required strong persuasion to accept the present.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV

The Petition for a Release

Neither Clara nor Vernon appeared at the mid-day table. Dr. Middleton talked with Miss Dale on classical matters, like a good-natured giant giving a child the jump from stone to stone across a brawling mountain ford, so that an unedified audience might really suppose, upon seeing her over the difficulty, she had done something for herself. Sir Willoughby was proud of her, and therefore anxious to settle her business while he was in the humour to lose her. He hoped to finish it by shooting a word or two at Vernon before dinner. Clara's petition to be set free, released from *him*, had vaguely frightened even more than it offended his pride.

Miss Isabel quitted the room.

She came back, saying, 'They decline to lunch.'

'Then we may rise,' remarked Sir Willoughby.

'She was weeping,' Miss Isabel murmured to him.

'Girlish enough,' he said.

The two elderly ladies went away together. Miss Dale, pursuing her theme with the Rev. Doctor, was invited by him to a course in the library. Sir Willoughby walked up and down the lawn, taking a glance at the West-room as he swung round on the turn of his leg. Growing impatient, he looked in at the window and found the room vacant.

Nothing was to be seen of Clara and Vernon during the afternoon. Near the dinner-hour the ladies were informed by Miss Middleton's maid that her mistress

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV
The Petition for a Release

was lying down on her bed, too unwell with headache to be present. Young Crossjay brought a message from Vernon (delayed by birds' eggs in the delivery), to say that he was off over the hills, and thought of dining with Dr. Corney.

Sir Willoughby despatched condolences to his bride. He was not well able to employ his mind on its customary topic, being, like the dome of a bell, a man of so pervading a ring within himself concerning himself, that the recollection of a doubtful speech or unpleasant circumstance touching him closely, deranged his inward peace; and as dubious and unpleasant things will often occur, he had great need of a worshipper, and was often compelled to appeal to her for signs of antidotal idolatry. In this instance, when the need of a worshipper was sharply felt, he obtained no signs at all. The Rev. Doctor had fascinated Miss Dale; so that, both within and without, Sir Willoughby was uncomforted. His themes in public were those of an English gentleman; horses, dogs, game, sport, intrigue, scandal, politics, wines, the manly themes; with a condescension to ladies' tattle, and approbation of a racy anecdote. What interest could he possibly take in the Athenian Theatre and the girl whose flute-playing behind the scenes, imitating the nightingale, enraptured a Greek audience! He would have suspected a motive in Miss Dale's eager attentiveness, if the motive could have been conceived. Besides, the ancients were not decorous; they did not, as we make our moderns do, write for ladies. He ventured at the dinner-table to interrupt Dr. Middleton once;

'Miss Dale will do wisely, I think, sir, by confining herself to your present edition of the classics.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV
The Petition for a Release

'That,' replied Dr. Middleton, 'is the observation of a student of the dictionary of classical mythology in the English tongue.'

'The Theatre is a matter of climate, sir. You will grant me that.'

'If quick wits come of climate, it is as you say, sir.'

'With us it seems a matter of painful fostering, or the need of it,' said Miss Dale, with a question to Dr. Middleton, excluding Sir Willoughby, as though he had been a temporary disturbance of the flow of their dialogue.

The ladies Eleanor and Isabel, previously excellent listeners to the learned talk, saw the necessity of coming to his rescue; but you cannot converse with your aunts, inmates of your house, on general subjects at table; the attempt increased his discomposure; he considered that he had ill-chosen his father-in-law; that scholars are an impolite race; that young or youngish women are devotees of power in any form, and will be absorbed by a scholar for a variation of a man; concluding that he must have a round of dinner-parties to friends, especially ladies, appreciating him, during the Doctor's visit. Clara's headache above, and Dr. Middleton's unmannerliness below, affected his instincts in a way to make him apprehend that a stroke of misfortune was impending; thunder was in the air. Still he learnt something, by which he was to profit subsequently. The topic of Wine withdrew the Doctor from his classics; it was magical on him. A strong fraternity of taste was discovered in the sentiments of host and guest upon particular wines and vintages; they kindled one another by

Digitized by Google

naming great years of the grape, and if Sir Willoughby had to sacrifice the ladies to the topic, he much regretted a condition of things that compelled him to sin against his habit, for the sake of being in the conversation and probing an elderly gentleman's foible.

Late at night he heard the house-bell, and meeting Vernon in the hall, invited him to enter the laboratory and tell him Dr. Corney's last. Vernon was brief; Corney had not let fly a single anecdote, he said, and lighted his candle.

'By the way, Vernon, you had a talk with Miss Middleton?'

'She will speak to you to-morrow at twelve.'

'To-morrow at twelve?'

'It gives her four and twenty hours.'

Sir Willoughby determined that his perplexity should be seen; but Vernon said good-night to him, and was shooting up the stairs before the dramatic exhibition of surprise had yielded to speech.

Thunder was in the air and a blow coming. Sir Willoughby's instincts were awake to the many signs, nor, though silenced, were they hushed by his harping on the frantic excesses to which women are driven by the passion of jealousy. He believed in Clara's jealousy because he really had intended to rouse it; under the form of emulation, feebly. He could not suppose she had spoken of it to Vernon. But as for the seriousness of her desire to be released from her engagement, that was little credible. Still the fixing of an hour for her to speak to him after an interval of four and twenty hours, left an opening for the incredible to add its weight to the suspicious mass: and who would have fancied Clara Middleton so wild

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV
The Petition for a Release

a victim of the intemperate passion! He muttered to himself several assuageing observations to excuse a young lady half-demented, and rejected them in a lump for their nonsensical inapplicability to Clara. In order to obtain some sleep, he consented to blame himself slightly, in the style of the enamoured historian of erring Beauties alluding to their peccadilloes. He had done it to edify her. Sleep, however, failed him. That an inordinate jealousy argued an overpowering love, solved his problem until he tried to fit the proposition to Clara's character. He had discerned nothing southern in her. Latterly, with the blushing Day in prospect, she had contracted and frozen. There was no reading either of her or the mystery.

In the morning, at the breakfast-table, a confession of sleeplessness was general. Excepting Miss Dale and Dr. Middleton, none had slept a wink. 'I, sir,' the Doctor replied to Sir Willoughby, 'slept like a lexicon in your library when Mr. Whitford and I are out of it.'

Vernon incidentally mentioned that he had been writing through the night.

'You fellows kill yourselves,' Sir Willoughby reproved him. 'For my part, I make it a principle to get through my work without self-slaughter.'

Clara watched her father for a symptom of ridicule. He gazed mildly on the systematic worker. She was unable to guess whether she would have in him an ally or a judge. The latter, she feared. Now that she had embraced the strife, she saw the division of the line where she stood from that one where the world places girls who are affianced wives: her father could hardly be with her; it had gone too far. He loved her, but

Digitized by Google

he would certainly take her to be moved by a maddish whim; he would not try to understand her case. The scholar's detestation of a disarrangement of human affairs that had been by miracle contrived to run smoothly, would of itself rank him against her; and with the world to back his view of her, he might behave like a despotic father. How could she defend herself before him? At one thought of Sir Willoughby, her tongue made ready, and feminine craft was alert to prompt it; but to her father she could imagine herself opposing only dumbness and obstinacy.

'It is not exactly the same kind of work,' she said.

Dr. Middleton rewarded her with a bushy eyebrow's beam of his revolving humour at the baronet's notion of work.

So little was needed to quicken her that she sunned herself in the beam, coaxing her father's eyes to stay with hers as long as she could, and beginning to hope he might be won to her side, if she confessed she had been more in the wrong than she felt; owned to him, that is, her error in not earlier disturbing his peace.

'I do not say it is the same,' observed Sir Willoughby, bowing to their alliance of opinion. 'My poor work is for the day, and Vernon's, no doubt, for the day to come. I contend, nevertheless, for the preservation of health, as the chief implement of work.'

'Of continued work: there I agree with you,' said Dr. Middleton cordially.

Clara's heart sank; so little was needed to deaden her.

Accuse her of an overweening antagonism to her betrothed; yet remember that though the words had

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV
The Petition for a Release

not been uttered to give her good reason for it, nature reads nature; captives may be stript of everything save that power to read their tyrant; remember also that she was not, as she well knew, blameless; her rage at him was partly against herself.

The rising from table left her to Sir Willoughby. She swam away after Miss Dale, exclaiming, 'The laboratory! Will you have me for a companion on your walk to see your father? One breathes earth and heaven to-day out of doors. Isn't it Summer with a Spring-breeze? I will wander about your garden and not hurry your visit, I promise.'

'I shall be very happy indeed. But I am going immediately,' said Lætitia, seeing Sir Willoughby hovering to snap up his bride.

'Yes; and a garden-hat and I am on the march.'

'I will wait for you on the terrace.'

'You will not have to wait.'

'Five minutes at the most,' Sir Willoughby said to Lætitia, and she passed out, leaving them alone together.

'Well, and my love!' he addressed his bride almost huggingly; 'and what is the story? and how did you succeed with old Vernon yesterday? He will and he won't? He's a very woman in these affairs. I can't forgive him for giving you a headache. You were found weeping.'

'Yes, I cried,' said Clara.

'And now tell me about it. You know, my dear girl, whether he does or doesn't, our keeping him somewhere in the neighbourhood—perhaps not in the house—that is the material point. It can hardly be necessary in these days to urge marriages on. I'm

Digitized by Google

sure the country is over . . . Most marriages ought to be celebrated with the funeral knell!'

'I think so,' said Clara.

'It will come to this, that marriages of consequence, and none but those, will be hailed with joyful peals.'

'Do not say such things in public, Willoughby.'

'Only to you, to you! Don't think me likely to expose myself to the world. Well, and I sounded Miss Dale, and there will be no violent obstacle. And now about Vernon?'

'I will speak to you, Willoughby, when I return from my walk with Miss Dale, soon after twelve.'

'Twelve!' said he.

'I name an hour. It seems childish. I can explain it. But it is named, I cannot deny, because I am a rather childish person perhaps, and have it prescribed to me to delay my speaking for a certain length of time. I may tell you at once that Mr. Whitford is not to be persuaded by me, and the breaking of our engagement would not induce him to remain.'

'Vernon used those words?'

'It was I.'

'"The breaking of our engagement"! Come into the laboratory, my love.'

'I shall not have time.'

'Time shall stop rather than interfere with our conversation! "The breaking . . .!" but it's a sort of sacrilege to speak of it.'

'That I feel; yet it has to be spoken of.'

'Sometimes? Why? I can't conceive the occasion. You know, to me, Clara, plighted faith, the affiancing of two lovers, is a piece of religion. I rank it as holy as marriage; nay, to me it is holier; I really cannot

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV
The Petition for a Release

tell you how; I can only appeal to you in your bosom to understand me. We read of divorces with comparative indifference. They occur between couples who have rubbed off all romance.'

She could have asked him in her fit of ironic iciness, on hearing him thus blindly challenge her to speak out, whether the romance might be his piece of religion.

He propitiated the more unwarlike sentiments in her by ejaculating: 'Poor souls! let them go their several ways. Married people no longer lovers are in the category of the unnameable. But the hint of the breaking of an engagement—our engagement!—between *us*? Oh!'

'Oh!' Clara came out with a swan's note swelling over mechanical imitation of him to dolorousness illimitable. 'Oh!' she breathed short, 'let it be now. Do not speak till you have heard me. My head may not be clear by-and-by. And two scenes—twice will be beyond my endurance. I am penitent for the wrong I have done you. I grieve for you. All the blame is mine. Willoughby, you must release me. Do not let me hear a word of that word; jealousy is unknown to me. . . . Happy if I could call you friend and see you with a worthier than I, who might by-and-by call me friend! You have my plighted troth . . . given in ignorance of my feelings. Reprobate a weak and foolish girl's ignorance. I have thought of it, and I cannot see wickedness, though the blame is great, shameful. You have none. You are without any blame. You will not suffer as I do. You will be generous to me? I have no respect for myself when I beg you to be generous and release me.'

Digitized by Google

'But this was the . . .' Willoughby preserved his calmness, 'this, then, the subject of your interview with Vernon?'

'I have spoken to him. I did my commission, and I spoke to him.'

'Of me?'

'Of myself. I see how I hurt you; I could not avoid it. Yes, of you, as far as we are related. I said I believed you would release me. I said I could be true to my plighted word, but that you would not insist. Could a gentleman insist? But not a step beyond; not love; I have none. And, Willoughby, treat me as one perfectly worthless; I am. I should have known it a year back. I was deceived in myself. There should be love.'

'Should be!' Willoughby's tone was a pungent comment on her.

'Love, then, I find I have not. I think I am antagonistic to it. What people say of it I have not experienced. I find I was mistaken. It is lightly said, but very painful. You understand me, that my prayer is for liberty, that I may not be tied. If you can release and pardon me, or promise ultimately to pardon me, or say some kind word, I shall know it is because I am beneath you utterly that I have been unable to give you the love you should have with a wife. Only say to me, go! It is you who break the match, discovering my want of a heart. What people think of me matters little. My anxiety will be to save you annoyance.'

She waited for him: he seemed on the verge of speaking.

He perceived her expectation; he had nothing but

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV
The Petition for a Release

clownish tumult within, and his dignity counselled him to disappoint her.

Swaying his head, like the oriental palm whose shade is a blessing to the perfervid wanderer below, smiling gravely, he was indirectly asking his dignity what he could say to maintain it and deal this mad young woman a bitterly compassionate rebuke. What to think, hung remoter. The thing to do struck him first.

He squeezed both her hands, threw the door wide open, and said, with countless blinkings: 'In the laboratory we are uninterrupted. I was at a loss to guess where that most unpleasant effect on the senses came from. They are always "guessing" through the nose. I mean, the remainder of breakfast here. Perhaps I satirized them too smartly—if you know the letters. When they are not "calculating." More offensive than débris of a midnight banquet! An American tour is instructive, though not so romantic. Not so romantic as Italy, I mean. Let us escape.'

She held back from his arm. She had scattered his brains; it was pitiable: but she was in the torrent and could not suffer a pause or a change of place.

'It must be here; one minute more—I cannot go elsewhere to begin again. Speak to me here; answer my request. Once; one word. If you forgive me, it will be superhuman. But, release me.'

'Seriously,' he rejoined, 'tea-cups and coffee-cups, bread-crumbs, egg-shells, caviare, butter, beef, bacon! Can we? The room reeks.'

'Then I will go for my walk with Miss Dale. And you will speak to me when I return?'

'At all seasons. You shall go with Miss Dale. But,

Digitized by Google

my dear! my love! Seriously, where are we? One hears of lovers' quarrels. Now, I never quarrel. It is a characteristic of mine. And you speak of me to my cousin Vernon! Seriously, plighted faith signifies plighted faith, as much as an iron-cable is iron to hold by. Some little twist of the mind? To Vernon, of all men! Tush! she has been dreaming of a hero of perfection, and the comparison is unfavourable to her Willoughby. But, my Clara, when I say to you, that bride is bride, and you are mine, mine!'

'Willoughby, you mentioned them,—those separations of two married. You said, if they do not love . . . Oh! say, is it not better . . . instead of later?'

He took advantage of her modesty in speaking to exclaim: 'Where are we now? Bride is bride, and wife is wife, and *affianced* is, in honour, *wedded*. You cannot be released. We are united. Recognize it: united. There is no possibility of releasing a wife!'

'Not if she ran . . .?'

This was too direct to be histrionically misunderstood. He had driven her to the extremity of more distinctly imagining the circumstance she had cited, and with that cleared view the desperate creature gloried in launching such a bolt at the man's real or assumed insensibility as must, by shivering it, waken him.

But in a moment she stood in burning rose, with dimmed eyesight. She saw his horror, and seeing shared it; shared just then only by seeing it; which led her to rejoice with the deepest of sighs that some shame was left in her.

'Ran? ran? ran?' he said as rapidly as he blinked. 'How? where? what idea . . .?'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV
The Petition for a Release

Close was he upon an explosion that would have sullied his conception of the purity of the younger members of the sex hauntingly.

That she, a young lady, maiden, of strictest education, should, and without his teaching, know that wives ran!—know that by running they compelled their husbands to abandon pursuit, surrender possession!—and that she should suggest it of herself as a wife!—that she should speak of running!—

His ideal, the common male Egoist ideal of a wax-work sex would have been shocked to fragments had she spoken further to fill in the outlines of these awful interjections.

She was tempted: for during the last few minutes the fire of her situation had enlightened her understanding upon a subject far from her as the ice-fields of the North a short while before; and the prospect offered to her courage if she would only outstare shame and seem at home in the doings of wickedness, was his loathing and dreading so vile a young woman. She restrained herself; chiefly, after the first bridling of maidenly timidity, because she could not bear to lower the idea of her sex even in his esteem.

The door was open. She had thoughts of flying out to breathe in an interval of truce.

She reflected on her situation hurriedly askance:

'If one must go through this, to be disentangled from an engagement, what must it be to poor women seeking to be free of a marriage?'

Had she spoken it, Sir Willoughby might have learnt that she was not so iniquitously wise of the things of this world as her mere sex's instinct, roused to the intemperateness of a creature struggling with

Digitized by Google

fetters, had made her appear in her dash to seize a weapon, indicated moreover by him.

Clara took up the old broken vow of women to vow it afresh: 'Never to any man will I give my hand.'

She replied to Sir Willoughby: 'I have said all. I cannot explain what I have said.'

She had heard a step in the passage. Vernon entered.

Perceiving them, he stated his mission in apology: 'Dr. Middleton left a book in this room. I see it; it 's a Heinsius.'

'Ha! by the way, a book; books would not be left here if they were not brought here, with my compliments to Dr. Middleton, who may do as he pleases, though seriously order is order,' said Sir Willoughby. 'Come away to the laboratory, Clara. It 's a comment on human beings that wherever they have been there 's a mess, and you admirers of them,' he divided a sickly nod between Vernon and the stale breakfast table, 'must make what you can of it. Come, Clara.'

Clara protested that she was engaged to walk with Miss Dale.

'Miss Dale is waiting in the hall,' said Vernon.

'Miss Dale is waiting,' said Clara.

'Walk with Miss Dale; walk with Miss Dale,' Sir Willoughby remarked pressingly. 'I will beg her to wait another two minutes. You shall find her in the hall when you come down.'

He rang the bell and went out.

'Take Miss Dale into your confidence; she is quite trustworthy,' Vernon said to Clara.

'I have not advanced one step,' she replied.

'Recollect that you are in a position of your own

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV
The Petition for a Release

choosing; and if, after thinking over it, you mean to escape you must make up your mind to pitched battles, and not be dejected if you are beaten in all of them; there is your only chance.'

'Not my choosing; do not say choosing, Mr. Whitford. I did not choose. I was incapable of really choosing. I consented.'

'It 's the same in fact. But be sure of what you wish.'

'Yes,' she assented, taking it for her just punishment that she should be supposed not quite to know her wishes. 'Your advice has helped me to-day.'

'Did I advise?'

'Do you regret advising?'

'I should certainly regret a word that intruded between you and him.'

'But you will not leave the Hall yet? You will not leave me without a friend? If papa and I were to leave to-morrow, I foresee endless correspondence. I have to stay at least some days, and wear through it, and then, if I have to speak to my poor father you can imagine the effect on him.'

Sir Willoughby came striding in, to correct the error of his going out.

'Miss Dale awaits you, my dear. You have bonnet, hat?—No? Have you forgotten your appointment to walk with her?'

'I am ready,' said Clara, departing.

The two gentlemen behind her separated in the passage. They had not spoken.

She had read of the reproach upon women, that they divide the friendships of men. She reproached herself, but she was in action, driven by necessity,

Digitized by Google

between sea and rock. Dreadful to think of! she was one of the creatures who are written about.

CHAPTER XVI

Clara and Lætitia

In spite of his honourable caution, Vernon had said things to render Miss Middleton more angrily determined than she had been in the scene with Sir Willoughby. His counting on pitched battles and a defeat for her in all of them, made her previous feelings appear slack in comparison with the energy of combat now animating her. And she could vehemently declare that she had not chosen; she was too young, too ignorant to choose. He had wrongly used that word; it sounded malicious; and to call consenting the same in fact as choosing, was wilfully unjust. Mr. Whitford meant well; he was conscientious, very conscientious. But he was not the hero descending from heaven bright-sworded to smite a woman's fetters off her limbs and deliver her from the yawning mouth-abyss.

His logical coolness of expostulation with her when she cast aside the silly mission entrusted to her by Sir Willoughby and wept for herself, was unheroic in proportion to its praiseworthiness. He had left it to her to do everything she wished done, stipulating simply that there should be a pause of four and twenty hours for her to consider of it before she proceeded in the attempt to extricate herself. Of consolation there had not been a word. Said he, 'I am the last

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI
Clara and Lætitia

man to give advice in such a case.' Yet she had by no means astonished him when her confession came out. It came out, she knew not how. It was led up to by his declining the idea of marriage, and her congratulating him on his exemption from the prospect of the yoke, but memory was too dull to revive the one or two fiery minutes of broken language when she had been guilty of her dire misconduct.

This gentleman was no flatterer, scarcely a friend. He could look on her grief without soothing her. Supposing he had soothed her warmly? All her sentiments collected in her bosom to dash in reprobation of him at the thought. She nevertheless condemned him for his excessive coolness; his transparent anxiety not to be compromised by a syllable; his air of saying, 'I guessed as much, but why plead your case to me?' And his recommendation to her to be quite sure she did know what she meant, was a little insulting. She exonerated him from the intention; he treated her as a girl. By what he said of Miss Dale, he proposed that lady for imitation.

'I must be myself or I shall be playing hypocrite to dig my own pitfall,' she said to herself, while taking counsel with Lætitia as to the route for their walk, and admiring a becoming curve in her companion's hat.

Sir Willoughby, with many protestations of regret that letters of business debarred him from the pleasure of accompanying them, remarked upon the path proposed by Miss Dale: 'In that case you must have a footman.'

'Then we adopt the other,' said Clara, and they set forth.

Digitized by Google

'Sir Willoughby,' Miss Dale said to her, 'is always in alarm about our unprotectedness.'

Clara glanced up at the clouds and closed her parasol. She replied, 'It inspires timidity.'

There was that in the accent and character of the answer which warned Lætitia to expect the reverse of a quiet chatter with Miss Middleton.

'You are fond of walking?' She chose a peaceful topic.

'Walking or riding; yes, of walking,' said Clara. 'The difficulty is to find companions.'

'We shall lose Mr. Whitford next week.'

'He goes?'

'He will be a great loss to me, for I do not ride,' Lætitia replied to the off-hand inquiry.

'Ah!'

Miss Middleton did not fan conversation when she simply breathed her voice.

Lætitia tried another neutral theme.

'The weather to-day suits our country,' she said.

'England, or Patterne Park? I am so devoted to mountains that I have no enthusiasm for flat land.'

'Do you call our country flat, Miss Middleton? We have undulations, hills, and we have sufficient diversity, meadows, rivers, copses, brooks, and good roads, and pretty by-paths.'

'The prettiness is overwhelming. It is very pretty to see; but to live with, I think I prefer ugliness. I can imagine learning to love ugliness. It's honest. However young you are, you cannot be deceived by it. These parks of rich people are a part of the prettiness. I would rather have fields, commons.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI
Clara and Lætitia

'The parks give us delightful green walks, paths through beautiful woods.'

'If there is a right of way for the public.'

'There should be,' said Miss Dale, wondering; and Clara cried, 'I chafe at restraint; hedges and palings everywhere! I should have to travel ten years to sit down contented among these fortifications. Of course I can read of this rich kind of English country with pleasure in poetry. But it seems to me to require poetry. What would you say of human beings requiring it?'

'That they are not so companionable but that the haze of distance improves the view.'

'Then you do know that you are the wisest!'

Lætitia raised her dark eyelashes; she sought to understand. She could only fancy she did; and if she did, it meant that Miss Middleton thought her wise in remaining single.

Clara was full of a sombre preconception that her 'jealousy' had been hinted to Miss Dale.

'You knew Miss Durham?' she said.

'Not intimately.'

'As well as you know me?'

'Not so well.'

'But you saw more of her?'

'She was more reserved with me.'

'Oh! Miss Dale, I would not be reserved with you.'

The thrill of the voice caused Lætitia to steal a look. Clara's eyes were bright, and she had the readiness to run to volubility of the feverstricken; otherwise she did not betray excitement.

'You will never allow any of these noble trees to be felled, Miss Middleton.'

Digitized by Google

'The axe is better than decay, do you not think?'

'I think your influence will be great and always used to good purpose.'

'My influence, Miss Dale? I have begged a favour this morning and cannot obtain the grant.'

It was lightly said, but Clara's face was more significant, and 'What?' leapt from Lætitia's lips.

Before she could excuse herself, Clara had answered: 'My liberty.'

In another and higher tone Lætitia said: 'What?' and she looked round on her companion; she looked in doubt that is open to conviction by a narrow aperture, and slowly and painfully yields access. Clara saw the vacancy of her expression gradually filling with woefulness.

'I have begged him to release me from my engagement, Miss Dale.'

'Sir Willoughby?'

'It is incredible to you. He refuses. You see I have no influence.'

'Miss Middleton, it is terrible!'

'To be dragged to the marriage service against one's will? Yes.'

'Oh! Miss Middleton.'

'Do you not think so?'

'That cannot be your meaning.'

'You do not suspect me of trifling? You know I would not. I am as much in earnest as a mouse in a trap.'

'No, you will not misunderstand me! Miss Middleton, such a blow to Sir Willoughby would be shocking, most cruel! He is devoted to you.'

'He was devoted to Miss Durham.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI
Clara and Lætitia

'Not so deeply: differently.'

'Was he not very much courted at that time? He is now; not so much: he is not so young. But my reason for speaking of Miss Durham was to exclaim at the strangeness of a girl winning her freedom to plunge into wedlock. Is it comprehensible to you? She flies from one dungeon into another. These are the acts which astonish men at our conduct, and cause them to ridicule and, I daresay, despise us.'

'But, Miss Middleton, for Sir Willoughby to grant such a request, if it was made . . .'

'It was made, and by me, and will be made again. I throw it all on my unworthiness, Miss Dale. So the county will think of me, and quite justly. I would rather defend him than myself. He requires a different wife from anything I can be. That is my discovery; unhappily a late one. The blame is all mine. The world cannot be too hard on me. But I must be free if I am to be kind in my judgements even of the gentleman I have injured.'

'So noble a gentleman!' Lætitia sighed.

'I will subscribe to any eulogy of him,' said Clara, with a penetrating thought as to the possibility of a lady experienced in him like Lætitia taking him for noble. 'He has a noble air. I say it sincerely, that your appreciation of him proves his nobility.' Her feeling of opposition to Sir Willoughby pushed her to this extravagance, gravely perplexing Lætitia. 'And it is,' added Clara, as if to support what she had said, 'a withering rebuke to me; I know him less, at least have not had so long an experience of him.'

Lætitia pondered on an obscurity in these words which would have accused her thick intelligence but

Digitized by Google

for a glimmer it threw on another most obscure communication. She feared it might be, strange though it seemed, jealousy, a shade of jealousy affecting Miss Middleton, as had been vaguely intimated by Sir Willoughby when they were waiting in the hall. 'A little feminine ailment, a want of comprehension of a perfect friendship'; those were his words to her: and he suggested vaguely that care must be taken in the eulogy of her friend.

She resolved to be explicit.

'I have not said that I think him beyond criticism, Miss Middleton.'

'Noble?'

'He has faults. When we have known a person for years the faults come out, but custom makes light of them; and I suppose we feel flattered by seeing what it would be difficult to be blind to! A very little flatters us!—Now, do you not admire that view? It is my favourite.'

Clara gazed over rolling richness of foliage, wood and water, and church spire, a town and horizon hills. There sang a skylark.

'Not even the bird that does not fly away!' she said; meaning, she had no heart for the bird satisfied to rise and descend in this place.

Lætitia travelled to some notion, dim and immense, of Miss Middleton's fever of distaste. She shrank from it in a kind of dread lest it might be contagious and rob her of her one ever-fresh possession of the homely picturesque; but Clara melted her by saying: 'For your sake I could love it . . . in time: or some dear old English scene. Since . . . since this . . . this change in me, I find I cannot separate landscape from

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI
Clara and Lætitia

associations. Now I learn how youth goes. I have grown years older in a week.—Miss Dale, if he were to give me my freedom? if he were to cast me off? if he stood alone?'

'I should pity him.'

'Him—not me! Oh! right. I hoped you would; I knew you would.'

Lætitia's attempt to shift Miss Middleton's shiftiness was vain; for now she seemed really listening to the language of jealousy: jealous of the ancient Letty Dale! —and immediately before, the tone was quite void of it.

'Yes,' she said, 'but you make me feel myself in the dark, and when I do I have the habit of throwing myself for guidance upon such light as I have within. You shall know me, if you will, as well as I know myself. And do not think me far from the point when I say I have a feeble health. I am what the doctors call anæmic; a rather bloodless creature. The blood is life, so I have not much life. Ten years back—eleven, if I must be precise, I thought of conquering the world with a pen! The result is that I am glad of a fireside, and not sure of always having one: and that is my achievement. My days are monotonous, but if I have a dread, it is that there will be an alteration in them. My father has very little money. We subsist on what private income he has, and his pension: he was an army doctor. I may by-and-by have to live in a town for pupils. I could be grateful to any one who would save me from that. I should be astonished at his choosing to have me burden his household as well.—Have I now explained the nature of my pity? It would be the pity of common sympathy, pure lymph of pity, as nearly disembodied as can be. Last year's

Digitized by Google

sheddings from the tree do not form an attractive garland. Their merit is, that they have not the ambition. I am like them. Now, Miss Middleton, I cannot make myself more bare to you. I hope you see my sincerity.'

'I do see it,' Clara said.

With the second heaving of her heart, she cried: 'See it, and envy you that humility! proud if I could ape it! Oh! how proud if I could speak so truthfully true!—You would not have spoken so to me without some good feeling out of which friends are made. That I am sure of. To be very truthful to a person, one must have a liking. So I judge by myself. Do I presume too much?'

Kindness was on Lætitia's face.

'But now,' said Clara, swimming on the wave in her bosom, 'I tax you with the silliest suspicion ever entertained by one of your rank. Lady, you have deemed me capable of the meanest of our vices!—Hold this hand, Lætitia, my friend, will you? Something is going on in me.'

Lætitia took her hand, and saw and felt that something was going on.

Clara said: 'You are a woman.'

It was her effort to account for the something.

She swam for a brilliant instant on tears, and yielded to the overflow.

When they had fallen, she remarked upon her first long breath quite coolly; 'An encouraging picture of a rebel, is it not?'

Her companion murmured to soothe her.

'It's little, it's nothing,' said Clara, pained to keep her lips in line.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI
Clara and Lætitia

They walked forward, holding hands, deep-hearted to one another.

'I like this country better now,' the shaken girl resumed. 'I could lie down in it and ask only for sleep. I should like to think of you here. How nobly self-respecting you must be, to speak as you did! Our dreams of heroes and heroines are cold glitter beside the reality. I have been lately thinking of myself as an outcast of my sex, and to have a good woman liking me a little . . . loving? Oh! Lætitia, my friend, I should have kissed you, and not made this exhibition of myself—and if you call it hysterics, woe to you! for I bit my tongue to keep it off when I had hardly strength to bring my teeth together—if that idea of jealousy had not been in your head. You had it from him.'

'I have not alluded to it in any word that I can recollect.'

'He can imagine no other cause for my wish to be released. I have noticed, it is his instinct to reckon on women as constant by their nature. They are the needles, and he the magnet. Jealousy of you, Miss Dale! Lætitia, may I speak?'

'Say everything you please.'

'I could wish:—Do you know my baptismal name?'

'Clara.'

'At last! I could wish . . . that is, if it were your wish. Yes, I could wish that. Next to independence, my wish would be that. I risk offending you. Do not let your delicacy take arms against me. I wish him happy in the only way that he can be made happy. There is my jealousy.'

'Was it what you were going to say just now?'

Digitized by Google

'No.'

'I thought not.'

'I was going to say—and I believe the rack would not make me truthful like you, Lætitia—well, has it ever struck you: remember, I do see his merits; I speak to his faithfullest friend, and I acknowledge he is attractive, he has manly tastes and habits; but has it never struck you . . . I have no right to ask; I know that men must have faults, I do not expect them to be saints; I am not one; I wish I were.'

'Has it never struck me . . .?' Lætitia prompted her.

'That very few women are able to be straightforwardly sincere in their speech, however much they may desire to be?'

'They are differently educated. Great misfortune brings it to them.'

'I am sure your answer is correct. Have you ever known a woman who was entirely an Egoist?'

'Personally known one? We are not better than men.'

'I do not pretend that we are. I have latterly become an Egoist, thinking of no one but myself, scheming to make use of every soul I meet. But then, women are in the position of inferiors. They are hardly out of the nursery when a lasso is round their necks; and if they have beauty, no wonder they turn it to a weapon and make as many captives as they can. I do not wonder! My sense of shame at my natural weakness and the arrogance of men would urge me to make hundreds captive, if that is being a coquette. I should not have compassion for those lofty birds, the hawks. To see them with their wings

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI
Clara and Lætitia

clipped would amuse me. Is there any other way of punishing them?'

'Consider what you lose in punishing them.'

'I consider what they gain if we do not.'

Lætitia supposed she was listening to discursive observations upon the inequality in the relations of the sexes. A suspicion of a drift to a closer meaning had been lulled, and the colour flooded her swiftly when Clara said: 'Here is the difference I see; I see it; I am certain of it: women who are called coquettes make their conquests not of the best of men; but men who are Egoists have *good* women for their victims; women on whose devoted constancy they feed; they drink it like blood. I am sure I am not taking the merely feminine view. They punish themselves too by passing over the one suitable to them, who could really give them what they crave to have, and they go where they . . .' Clara stopped. 'I have not your power to express ideas,' she said.

'Miss Middleton, you have a dreadful power,' said Lætitia.

Clara smiled affectionately: 'I am not aware of any. Whose cottage is this?'

'My father's. Will you not come in? into the garden?'

Clara took note of ivied windows and roses in the porch. She thanked Lætitia and said: 'I will call for you in an hour.'

'Are you walking on the road alone?' said Lætitia incredulously, with an eye to Sir Willoughby's dismay.

'I put my trust in the highroad,' Clara replied, and turned away, but turned back to Lætitia and offered her face to be kissed.

Digitized by Google

The 'dreadful power' of this young lady had fervently impressed Lætitia, and in kissing her she marvelled at her gentleness and girlishness.

Clara walked on, unconscious of her possession of power of any kind.

CHAPTER XVII

The Porcelain Vase

During the term of Clara's walk with Lætitia, Sir Willoughby's shrunken self-esteem, like a garment hung to the fire after exposure to tempestuous weather, recovered some of the sleekness of its velvet pile in the society of Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, who represented to him the world he feared and tried to keep sunny for himself by all the arts he could exercise. She expected him to be the gay Sir Willoughby, and her look being as good as an incantation-summons, he produced the accustomed sprite, giving her sally for sally. Queens govern the polite. Popularity with men, serviceable as it is for winning favouritism with women, is of poor value to a sensitive gentleman, anxious even to prognostic apprehension on behalf of his pride, his comfort and his prevalence. And men are grossly purchaseable; good wines have them, good cigars, a goodfellow air: they are never quite worth their salt even then; you can make head against their ill looks. But the looks of women will at one blow work on you the downright difference which is between the cock of lordly plume and the moulting. Happily they may be gained: a clever tongue will gain

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVII
The Porcelain Vase

them, a leg. They are with you to a certainty if Nature is with you; if you are elegant and discreet: if the sun is on you, and they see you shining in it; or if they have seen you well-stationed and handsome in the sun. And once gained they are your mirrors for life, and far more constant than the glass. That tale of their caprice is absurd. Hit their imaginations once, they are your slaves, only demanding common courtier service of you. They will deny that you are ageing, they will cover you from scandal, they will refuse to see you ridiculous. Sir Willoughby's instinct, or skin, or outfloating feelers, told him of these mysteries of the influence of the sex; he had as little need to study them as a lady breathed on.

He had some need to know them, in fact; and with him the need of a protection for himself called it forth; he was intuitively a conjuror in self-defence, long-sighted, wanting no directions to the herb he was to suck at when fighting a serpent. His dulness of vision into the heart of his enemy was compensated by the agile sensitiveness obscuring but rendering him miraculously active, and without supposing his need immediate, he deemed it politic to fascinate Mrs. Mountstuart and anticipate ghastly possibilities in the future by dropping a hint; not of Clara's fickleness, you may be sure; of his own, rather; or more justly, of an altered view of Clara's character. He touched on the *rogue in porcelain.*

Set gently laughing by his relishing humour: 'I get nearer to it,' he said.

'Remember, I'm in love with her,' said Mrs. Mountstuart.

'That is our penalty.'

Digitized by Google

'A pleasant one for you.'

He assented. 'Is the "rogue" to be eliminated?'

'Ask, when she's a mother, my dear Sir Willoughby.'

'This is how I read you:—'

'I shall accept any interpretation that is complimentary.'

'Not one will satisfy me of being sufficiently so, and so I leave it to the character to fill out the epigram.'

'Do. What hurry is there? And don't be misled by your objection to rogue; which would be reasonable if you had not secured her.'

The door of a hollow chamber of horrible reverberation was opened within him by this remark.

He tried to say in jest, that it was not always a passionate admiration that held the rogue fast; but he muddled it in the thick of his conscious thunder, and Mrs. Mountstuart smiled to see him shot from the smooth-flowing dialogue into the cataracts by one simple reminder to the lover of his luck. Necessarily after a fall, the pitch of their conversation relaxed.

'Miss Dale is looking well,' he said.

'Fairly: she ought to marry,' said Mrs. Mountstuart.

He shook his head. 'Persuade her.'

She nodded: 'Example may have some effect.'

He looked extremely abstracted. 'Yes, it is time. Where is the man you could recommend for her complement? She has now what was missing before, a ripe intelligence in addition to her happy disposition —romantic, you would say. I can't think women the worse for that.'

'A dash of it.'

'She calls it "leafage."'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVII
The Porcelain Vase

'Very pretty. And have you relented about your horse Achmet?'

'I don't sell him under four hundred.'

'Poor Johnny Busshe! You forget that his wife doles him out his money. You're a hard bargainer, Sir Willoughby.'

'I mean the price to be prohibitive.'

'Very well; and "leafage" is good for hide and seek; especially when there is no rogue in ambush. And that's the worst I can say of Lætitia Dale. An exaggerated devotion is the scandal of our sex. They say you're the hardest man of business in the county too, and I can believe it; for at home and abroad your aim is to get the best of everybody. You see I've no leafage, I am perfectly matter-of-fact, bald.'

'Nevertheless, my dear Mrs. Mountstuart, I can assure you that conversing with you has much the same exhilarating effect on me as conversing with Miss Dale.'

'But, leafage! leafage! You hard bargainers have no compassion for devoted spinsters.'

'I tell you my sentiments absolutely.'

'And you have mine moderately expressed.'

She recollected the purpose of her morning's visit, which was to engage Dr. Middleton to dine with her, and Sir Willoughby conducted her to the library door. 'Insist,' he said.

Awaiting her reappearance, the refreshment of the talk he had sustained, not without point, assisted him to distinguish in its complete abhorrent orb the offence committed against him by his bride. And this he did through projecting it more and more away from him, so that in the outer distance it

Digitized by Google

involved his personal emotions less, while observation was enabled to compass its vastness, and, as it were, perceive the whole spherical mass of the wretched girl's guilt impudently turning on its axis.

Thus to detach an injury done to us, and plant it in space, for mathematical measurement of its weight and bulk, is an art; it may also be an instinct of self-preservation; otherwise, as when mountains crumble adjacent villages are crushed, men of feeling may at any moment be killed outright by the iniquitous and the callous. But, as an art, it should be known to those who are for practising an art so beneficent, that circumstances must lend their aid. Sir Willoughby's instinct even had sat dull and crushed before his conversation with Mrs. Mountstuart. She lifted him to one of his ideals of himself. Among gentlemen he was the English gentleman; with ladies his aim was the Gallican courtier of any period from Louis Treize to Louis Quinze. He could doat on those who led him to talk in that character—backed by English solidity, you understand. Roast beef stood eminent behind the soufflé and champagne. An English squire excelling his fellows at hazardous leaps in public, he was additionally a polished whisperer, a lively dialoguer, one for witty bouts, with something in him—capacity for a drive and dig or two—beyond mere wit, as they soon learnt who called up his reserves, and had a bosom for pinking. So much for his ideal of himself. Now, Clara not only never evoked, never responded to it, she repelled it; there was no flourishing of it near her. He considerately overlooked these facts in

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVII
The Porcelain Vase

his ordinary calculations; he was a man of honour and she was a girl of beauty; but the accidental blossoming of his ideal, with Mrs. Mountstuart, on the very heels of Clara's offence, restored him to full command of his art of detachment, and he thrust her out, quite apart from himself, to contemplate her disgraceful revolutions.

Deeply read in the Book of Egoism that he was, he knew the wisdom of the sentence: *An injured pride that strikes not out will strike home.* What was he to strike with? Ten years younger, Lætitia might have been the instrument. To think of her now was preposterous. Beside Clara she had the hue of Winter under the springing bough. He tossed her away, vexed to the very soul by an ostentatious decay that shrank from comparison with the blooming creature he had to scourge in self-defence, by some agency or other.

Mrs. Mountstuart was on the step of her carriage when the silken parasols of the young ladies were descried on a slope of the park, where the yellow green of May-clothed beeches flowed over the brown ground of last year's leaves.

'Who 's the cavalier?' she inquired.

A gentleman escorted them.

'Vernon? No! he 's pegging at Crossjay,' quoth Willoughby.

Vernon and Crossjay came out for the boy's half-hour's run before his dinner. Crossjay spied Miss Middleton and was off to meet her at a bound. Vernon followed him leisurely.

'The rogue has no cousin, has she?' said Mrs. Mountstuart.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVII
The Porcelain Vase

'It's a family of one son or one daughter for generations,' replied Willoughby.

'And Letty Dale?'

'Cousin!' he exclaimed, as if wealth had been imputed to Miss Dale; adding: 'No male cousin.'

A railway-station fly drove out of the avenue on the circle to the hall-entrance. Flitch was driver. He had no right to be there, he was doing wrong, but he was doing it under cover of an office, to support his wife and young ones, and his deprecating touches of the hat spoke of these apologies to his former master with dog-like pathos.

Sir Willoughby beckoned to him to approach.

'So you are here,' he said. 'You have luggage.'

Flitch jumped from the box and read one of the labels aloud: 'Lieut.-Colonel H. de Craye.'

'And the colonel met the ladies? Overtook them?'

Here seemed to come dismal matter for Flitch to relate.

He began upon the abstract origin of it: he had lost his place in Sir Willoughby's establishment, and was obliged to look about for work where it was to be got, and though he knew he had no right to be where he was, he hoped to be forgiven because of the mouths he had to feed as a flyman attached to the railway station, where this gentleman, the colonel, hired him, and he believed Sir Willoughby would excuse him for driving a friend, which the colonel was, he recollected well, and the colonel recollected him, and he said, not noticing how he was rigged: 'What! Flitch! back in your old place?—Am I expected?' and he told the colonel his unfortunate situation; 'Not back, colonel; no such luck for me': and Colonel de Craye was a very kind-

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVII
The Porcelain Vase

hearted gentleman, as he always had been, and asked kindly after his family. And it might be that such poor work as he was doing now he might be deprived of, such is misfortune when it once harpoons a man; you may dive, and you may fly, but it sticks in you, once do a foolish thing. 'May I humbly beg of you, if you 'll be so good, Sir Willoughby,' said Flitch, passing to evidence of the sad mishap. He opened the door of the fly, displaying fragments of broken porcelain.

'But, what, what! what 's the story of this?' cried Sir Willoughby.

'What is it?' said Mrs. Mountstuart, pricking up her ears.

'It was a vaws,' Flitch replied in elegy.

'A porcelain vase!' interpreted Sir Willoughby.

'China!' Mrs. Mountstuart faintly shrieked.

One of the pieces was handed to her inspection.

She held it close, she held it distant. She sighed horribly.

'The man had better have hanged himself,' said she.

Flitch bestirred his misfortune-sodden features and members for a continuation of the doleful narrative.

'How did this occur?' Sir Willoughby peremptorily asked him.

Flitch appealed to his former master for testimony that he was a good and a careful driver.

Sir Willoughby thundered: 'I tell you to tell me how this occurred.'

'Not a drop, my lady! not since my supper last night, if there 's any truth in me'; Flitch implored succour of Mrs. Mountstuart.

'Drive straight,' she said, and braced him.

Digitized by Google

His narrative was then direct.

Near Piper's mill, where the Wicker brook crossed the Rebdon road, one of Hoppner's waggons, overloaded as usual, was forcing the horses uphill, when Flitch drove down at an easy pace, and saw himself between Hoppner's cart come to a stand, and a young lady advancing: and just then the carter smacks his whip, the horses pull half mad. The young lady starts behind the cart, and up jumps the colonel, and to save the young lady, Flitch dashed ahead and did save her, he thanked heaven for it, and more when he came to see who the young lady was.

'She was alone?' said Sir Willoughby, in tragic amazement, staring at Flitch.

'Very well, you saved her, and you upset the fly,' Mrs. Mountstuart jogged him on.

'Bartlett, our old head-keeper, was a witness, my lady; I had to drive half up the bank, and it 's true—over the fly did go; and the vaws it shoots out against the twelfth milestone, just as though *there* was the chance for it! for nobody else was injured, and knocked against anything else, it never would have flown all to pieces, so that it took Bartlett and me ten minutes to collect every one, down to the smallest piece there was; and he said, and I can't help thinking myself, there was a Providence in it, for we all come together so as you might say we was made to do as we did.'

'So then Horace adopted the prudent course of walking on with the ladies instead of trusting his limbs again to this capsizing fly,' Sir Willoughby said to Mrs. Mountstuart; and she rejoined: 'Lucky that no one was hurt.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVII The Porcelain Vase

Both of them eyed the nose of poor Flitch, and simultaneously they delivered a verdict of 'Humph.'

Mrs. Mountstuart handed the wretch a half-crown from her purse. Sir Willoughby directed the footman in attendance to unload the fly and gather up the fragments of porcelain carefully, bidding Flitch be quick in his departing.

'The colonel's wedding-present! I shall call to-morrow,' Mrs. Mountstuart waved her adieu.

'Come every day!—Yes, I suppose we may guess the destination of the vase.' He bowed her off: and she cried:

'Well, now the gift can be shared, if you're either of you for a division.' In the crash of the carriage-wheels he heard: 'At any rate there was a rogue in *that* porcelain.'

These are the slaps we get from a heedless world.

As for the vase, it was Horace de Craye's loss. Wedding-present he would have to produce, and decidedly not in chips. It had the look of a costly vase, but that was no question for the moment:—What was meant by Clara being seen walking on the highroad alone?—What snare, traceable ad inferas, had ever induced Willoughby Patterne to make her the repository and fortress of his honour!

CHAPTER XVIII

Colonel de Craye

Clara came along chatting and laughing with Colonel de Craye, young Crossjay's hand under one of her

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVIII Colonel de Craye

arms, and her parasol flashing; a dazzling offender; as if she wished to compel the spectator to recognize the dainty rogue in porcelain; really insufferably fair: perfect in height and grace of movement; exquisitely-tressed; red-lipped, the colour striking out to a distance from her ivory skin: a sight to set the woodland dancing, and turn the heads of the town; though beautiful, a jury of art-critics might pronounce her not to be. Irregular features are condemned in beauty. Beautiful figure, they could say. A description of her figure and her walking would have won her any praises: and she wore a dress cunning to embrace the shape and flutter loose about it, in the spirit of a Summer's day. Calypso-clad, Dr. Middleton would have called her. See the silver birch in a breeze: here it swells, there it scatters, and it is puffed to a round and it streams like a pennon, and now gives the glimpse and shine of the white stem's line within, now hurries over it, denying that it was visible, with a chatter along the sweeping folds, while still the white peeps through. She had the wonderful art of dressing to suit the season and the sky. To-day the art was ravishingly companionable with her sweet-lighted face: too sweet, too vividly meaningful for pretty, if not of the strict severity for beautiful. Millinery would tell us that she wore a fichu of thin white muslin crossed in front on a dress of the same light stuff, trimmed with deep rose. She carried a grey-silk parasol, traced at the borders with green creepers, and across the arm devoted to Crossjay, a length of trailing ivy, and in that hand a bunch of the first long grasses. These hues of red rose and green and pale green, ruffled and pouted in the billowy

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVIII Colonel de Craye

white of the dress ballooning and valleying softly, like a yacht before the sail bends low; but she walked not like one blown against; resembling rather the day of the South-west driving the clouds, gallantly firm in commotion; interfusing colour and varying in her features from laugh to smile and look of settled pleasure, like the heavens above the breeze.

Sir Willoughby, as he frequently had occasion to protest to Clara, was no poet: he was a more than commonly candid English gentleman in his avowed dislike of the poet's nonsense, verbiage, verse; not one of those latterly terrorized by the noise made about the fellow into silent contempt; a sentiment that may sleep, and has not to be defended. He loathed the fellow, fought the fellow. But he was one with the poet upon that prevailing theme of verse, the charms of women. He was, to his ill-luck, intensely susceptible, and where he led men after him to admire, his admiration became a fury. He could see at a glance that Horace de Craye admired Miss Middleton. Horace was a man of taste, could hardly, could not, do other than admire; but how curious that in the setting forth of Clara and Miss Dale, in his own contemplation and comparison of them, Sir Willoughby had given but a nodding approbation of his bride's appearance! He had not attached weight to it recently.

Her conduct, and foremost, if not chiefly, her having been discovered, positively met by his friend Horace, walking on the high road without companion or attendant, increased a sense of pain so very unusual with him that he had cause to be indignant. Coming on this condition, his admiration of the girl who

Digitized by Google

wounded him was as bitter a thing as a man could feel. Resentment, fed from the main springs of his nature, turned it to wormwood, and not a whit the less was it admiration when he resolved to chastise her with a formal indication of his disdain. Her present gaiety sounded to him like laughter heard in the shadow of the pulpit.

'You have escaped!' he said to her, while shaking the hand of his friend Horace and cordially welcoming him: 'My dear fellow! and by the way, you had a squeak for it, I hear from Flitch.'

'I, Willoughby? not a bit,' said the colonel; 'we get into a fly to get out of it; and Flitch helped me out as well as in, good fellow; just dusting my coat as he did it. The only bit of bad management was that Miss Middleton had to step aside a trifle hurriedly.'

'You knew Miss Middleton at once?'

'Flitch did me the favour to introduce me. He first precipitated me at Miss Middleton's feet, and then he introduced me, in old oriental fashion, to my sovereign.'

Sir Willoughby's countenance was enough for his friend Horace. Quarter-wheeling to Clara, he said: ''Tis the place I'm to occupy for life, Miss Middleton, though one is not always fortunate to have a bright excuse for taking it at the commencement.'

Clara said: 'Happily you were not hurt, Colonel de Craye.'

'I was in the hands of the Loves. Not the Graces; I'm afraid; I've an image of myself. Dear, no! My dear Willoughby, you never made such a headlong declaration as that. It would have looked like a magnificent impulse, if the posture had only been

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVIII Colonel de Craye

choicer. And Miss Middleton didn't laugh. At least I saw nothing but pity.'

'You did not write,' said Willoughby.

'Because it was a toss up of a run to Ireland or here, and I came here not to go there; and by the way, fetched a jug with me to offer up to the Gods of ill-luck; and they accepted the propitiation.'

'Wasn't it packed in a box?'

'No, it was wrapped in paper, to show its elegant form. I caught sight of it in the shop yesterday, and carried it off this morning, and presented it to Miss Middleton at noon, without any form at all.'

Willoughby knew his friend Horace's mood when the Irish tongue in him threatened to wag.

'You see what may happen,' he said to Clara.

'As far as I am in fault I regret it,' she answered.

'Flitch says the accident occurred through his driving up the bank to save you from the wheels.'

'Flitch may go and whisper that down the neck of his empty whisky flask,' said Horace de Craye. 'And then let him cork it.'

'The consequence is that we have a porcelain vase broken. You should not walk on the road alone, Clara. You ought to have a companion, always. It is the rule here.'

'I had left Miss Dale at the cottage.'

'You ought to have had the dogs.'

'Would they have been any protection to the vase?'

Horace de Craye crowed cordially.

'I'm afraid not, Miss Middleton. One must go to the witches for protection to vases; and they're all in the air now, having their own way with us, which accounts for the confusion in politics and society,

Digitized by Google

and the rise in the price of broomsticks, to prove it true, as they tell us, that every nook and corner wants a mighty sweeping. Miss Dale looks beaming,' said De Craye, wishing to divert Willoughby from his anger with sense as well as nonsense.

'You have not been visiting Ireland recently,' said Sir Willoughby.

'No, nor making acquaintance with an actor in an Irish part in a drama cast in the green island. 'Tis Flitch, my dear Willoughby, has been and stirred the native in me, and we'll present him to you for the like good office when we hear after a number of years that you've not wrinkled your forehead once at your liege lady. Take the poor old dog back home, will you? He's crazed to be at the Hall. I say, Willoughby, it would be a good bit of work to take him back. Think of it; you'll do the popular thing, I'm sure. I've a superstition that Flitch ought to drive you from the church-door. If I were in luck, I'd have him drive me.'

'The man's a drunkard, Horace.'

'He fuddles his poor nose. 'Tis merely unction to the exile. Sober struggles below. He drinks to rock his heart, because he has one. Now let me intercede for poor Flitch.'

'Not a word of him. He threw up his place.'

'To try his fortune in the world, as the best of us do, though livery runs after us to tell us there's no being an independent gentleman, and comes a cold day we haul on the metal-button coat again, with a good ha! of satisfaction. You'll do the popular thing. Miss Middleton joins in the pleading.'

'No pleading!'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVIII Colonel de Craye

'When I've vowed upon my eloquence, Willoughby, I'd bring you to pardon the poor dog?'

'Not a word of him!'

'Just one!'

Sir Willoughby battled with himself to repress a state of temper that put him to marked disadvantage beside his friend Horace in high spirits. Ordinarily he enjoyed these fits of Irish of him, which were Horace's fun and play, at times involuntary, and then they indicated a recklessness that might embrace mischief. De Craye, as Willoughby had often reminded him, was properly Norman. The blood of two or three Irish mothers in his line, however, was enough to dance him, and if his fine profile spoke of the stiffer race, his eyes and the quick run of the lip in the cheek, and a number of his qualities, were evidence of the maternal legacy.

'My word has been said about the man,' Willoughby replied.

'But I've wagered on your heart against your word, and can't afford to lose; and there's a double reason for revoking for you!'

'I don't see either of them. Here are the ladies.'

'You'll think of the poor beast, Willoughby.'

'I hope for better occupation.'

'If he drives a wheelbarrow at the Hall he'll be happier than on board a chariot at large. He's broken-hearted.'

'He's too much in the way of breakages, my dear Horace.'

'Oh! the vase! the bit of porcelain!' sang De Craye. 'Well, we'll talk him over by-and-by.'

'If it pleases you; but my rules are never amended.'

Digitized by Google

'Inalterable, are they?—like those of an ancient people who might as well have worn a jacket of lead for the comfort they had of their boast. The beauty of laws for human creatures is their adaptability to new stitchings.'

CHAPTER XVIII Colonel de Craye

Colonel de Craye walked at the heels of his leader to make his bow to the ladies Eleanor and Isabel.

Sir Willoughby had guessed the person who inspired his friend Horace to plead so pertinaciously and inopportunely for the man Flitch; and it had not improved his temper or the pose of his rejoinders; he had winced under the contrast of his friend Horace's easy, laughing, sparkling, musical air and manner with his own stiffness; and he had seen Clara's face, too, scanning the contrast—he was fatally driven to exaggerate his discontentment, which did not restore him to serenity. He would have learnt more from what his abrupt swing round of the shoulder precluded his beholding. There was an interchange between Colonel de Craye and Miss Middleton; spontaneous on both sides. His was a look that said: 'You were right'; hers: 'I knew it.' Her look was calmer, and after the first instant clouded as by wearifulness of sameness; his was brilliant, astonished, speculative, and admiring, pitiful: a look that poised over a revelation, called up the hosts of wonder to question strange fact.

It had passed unseen by Sir Willoughby. The observer was the one who could also supply the key of the secret. Miss Dale had found Colonel de Craye in company with Miss Middleton at her gateway. They were laughing and talking together like friends of old standing, De Craye as Irish as he could be: and the Irish tongue and gentlemaniy manner are an

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVIII Colonel de Craye

irresistible challenge to the opening steps of familiarity when accident has broken the ice. Flitch was their theme; and: 'Oh! but if we go up to Willoughby hand in hand, and bob a curtsey to 'm and beg his pardon for Mister Flitch, won't he melt to such a pair of suppliants? of course he will!' Miss Middleton said he would not. Colonel de Craye wagered he would; he knew Willoughby best. Miss Middleton looked simply grave; a way of asserting the contrary opinion that tells of rueful experience. 'We 'll see,' said the colonel. They chatted like a couple unexpectedly discovering in one another a common dialect among strangers. Can there be an end to it when those two meet? They prattle, they fill the minutes, as though they were violently to be torn asunder at a coming signal, and must have it out while they can; it is a meeting of mountain brooks; not a colloquy but a chasing, impossible to say which flies, which follows, or what the topic, so interlinguistic are they and rapidly counterchanging. After their conversation of an hour before, Lætitia watched Miss Middleton in surprise at her lightness of mind. Clara bathed in mirth. A boy in a Summer stream shows not heartier refreshment of his whole being. Lætitia could now understand Vernon's idea of her wit. And it seemed that she also had Irish blood. Speaking of Ireland, Miss Middleton said she had cousins there, her only relatives. 'The laugh told me that,' said Colonel de Craye.

Lætitia and Vernon paced up and down the lawn. Colonel de Craye was talking with English sedateness to the ladies Eleanor and Isabel. Clara and young Crossjay strayed.

Digitized by Google

'If I might advise, I would say, do not leave the Hall immediately, not yet,' Lætitia said to Vernon.

CHAPTER XVIII Colonel de Craye

'You know, then?'

'I cannot understand why it was that I was taken into her confidence.'

'I counselled it.'

'But it was done without an object that I can see.'

'The speaking did her good.'

'But how capricious! how changeful!'

'Better now than later.'

'Surely she has only to ask to be released?—to ask earnestly: if it is her wish.'

'You are mistaken.'

'Why does she not make a confidant of her father.'

'That she will have to do. She wished to spare him.'

'He cannot be spared if she is to break the engagement.'

'She thought of sparing him the annoyance. Now there 's to be a tussle he must share in it.'

'Or she thought he might not side with her?'

'She has not a single instinct of cunning. You judge her harshly.'

'She moved me on the walk out. Coming home I felt differently.'

Vernon glanced at Colonel de Craye.

'She wants *good* guidance,' continued Lætitia.

'She has not an idea of treachery.'

'You think so? It may be true. But she seems one born devoid of patience, easily made reckless. There is a wildness . . . I judge by her way of

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVIII Colonel de Craye

speaking; that at least appeared sincere. She does not practise concealment. He will naturally find it almost incredible. The change in her, so sudden, so wayward, is unintelligible to me. To me it is the conduct of a creature untamed. He may hold her to her word and be justified.'

'Let him look out if he does!'

'Is not that harsher than anything I have said of her?'

'I 'm not appointed to praise her. I fancy I read the case; and it 's a case of opposition of temperaments. We never can tell the person quite suited to us; it strikes us in a flash.'

'That they are *not* suited to us? Oh, no; that comes by degrees.'

'Yes, but the accumulation of evidence, or sentience, if you like, is combustible; we don't command the spark: it may be late in falling. And you argue in her favour. Consider her as a generous and impulsive girl, outwearied at last.'

'By what?'

'By anything; by his loftiness, if you like. He flies too high for her, we will say.'

'Sir Willoughby an eagle?'

'She may be tired of his eyrie.'

The sound of the word in Vernon's mouth smote on a consciousness she had of his full grasp of Sir Willoughby, and her own timid knowledge, though he was not a man who played on words.

If he had eased his heart in stressing the first syllable, it was only temporary relief. He was heavy-browed enough.

'But I cannot conceive what she expects me to do

Digitized by Google

by confiding her sense of her position to me,' said Lætitia.

CHAPTER XVIII Colonel de Craye

'We none of us know what will be done. We hang on Willoughby, who hangs on whatever it is that supports him: and there we are in a swarm.'

'You see the wisdom of staying, Mr. Whitford.'

'It must be over in a day or two. Yes, I stay.'

'She inclines to obey you.'

'I should be sorry to stake my authority on her obedience. We must decide something about Crossjay, and get the money for his crammer, if it is to be got. If not, I may get a man to trust me. I mean to drag the boy away. Willoughby has been at him with the tune of gentleman, and has laid hold of him by one ear. When I say "her obedience," she is not in a situation, nor in a condition, to be led blindly by anybody. She must rely on herself, do everything herself. It's a knot that won't bear touching by any hand save hers.'

'I fear . . .' said Lætitia.

'Have no such fear.'

'If it should come to his positively refusing.'

'He faces the consequences.'

'You do not think of her.'

Vernon looked at his companion.

CHAPTER XIX

Colonel de Craye and Clara Middleton

Miss Middleton finished her stroll with Crossjay by winding her trailer of ivy in a wreath round his hat and sticking her bunch of grasses in the wreath. She

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIX Colonel de Craye and Clara Middleton

then commanded him to sit on the ground beside a big rhododendron, there to await her return. Crossjay had informed her of a design he entertained to be off with a horde of boys nesting in high trees, and marking spots where wasps and hornets were to be attacked in Autumn: she thought it a dangerous business, and as the boy's dinner-bell had very little restraint over him when he was in the flush of a scheme of this description, she wished to make tolerably sure of him through the charm she not unreadily believed she could fling on lads of his age. 'Promise me you will not move from here until I come back, and when I come I will give you a kiss.' Crossjay promised. She left him and forgot him.

Seeing by her watch fifteen minutes to the ringing of the bell, a sudden resolve that she would speak to her father without another minute's delay, had prompted her like a superstitious impulse to abandon her aimless course and be direct. She knew what was good for her; she knew it now more clearly than in the morning. To be taken away instantly! was her cry. There could be no further doubt. Had there been any before? But she would not in the morning have suspected herself of a capacity for evil, and of a pressing need to be saved from herself. She was not pure of nature: it may be that we breed saintly souls which are: she was pure of will: fire rather than ice. And in beginning to see the elements she was made of, she did not shuffle them to a heap with her sweet looks to front her. She put to her account some strength, much weakness; she almost dared to gaze unblinking at a perilous evil tendency. The glimpse of it drove her to her father.

Digitized by Google

'He must take me away at once; to-morrow!'

CHAPTER XIX Colonel de Craye and Clara Middleton

She wished to spare her father. So unsparing of herself was she, that in her hesitation to speak to him of her change of feeling for Sir Willoughby, she would not suffer it to be attributed in her own mind to a daughter's anxious consideration about her father's loneliness; an idea she had indulged formerly. Acknowledging that it was imperative she should speak, she understood that she had refrained, even to the inflicting upon herself of such humiliation as to run dilating on her woes to others, because of the silliest of human desires to preserve her reputation for consistency. She had heard women abused for shallowness and flightiness: she had heard her father denounce them as veering weathervanes, and his oft-repeated quid femina possit: for her sex's sake, and also to appear an exception to her sex, this reasoning creature desired to be thought consistent.

Just on the instant of her addressing him, saying: 'Father': a note of seriousness in his ear; it struck her that the occasion for saying all had not yet arrived, and she quickly interposed: 'Papa'; and helped him to look lighter. The petition to be taken away was uttered.

'To London?' said Dr. Middleton. 'I don't know who 'll take us in.'

'To France, papa?'

'That means hotel-life.'

'Only for two or three weeks.'

'Weeks! I am under an engagement to dine with Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson five days hence: that is, on Thursday.'

'Could we not find an excuse?'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIX
Colonel de Craye and Clara Middleton

'Break an engagement? No, my dear, not even to escape drinking a widow's wine.'

'Does a word bind us?'

'Why, what else should?'

'I think I am not very well.'

'We 'll call in that man we met at dinner here: Corney: a capital doctor; an old-fashioned anecdotal doctor. How is it you are not well, my love? You look well. I cannot conceive your not being well.'

'It is only that I want a change of air, papa.'

'There we are—a change! semper eadem! Women will be wanting a change of air in Paradise; a change of angels too, I might surmise. A change from quarters like these to a French hotel, would be a descent!—"this the seat, this mournful gloom for that celestial light?" I am perfectly at home in the library here. That excellent fellow Whitford and I have real days: and I like him for showing fight to his elder and better.'

'He is going to leave.'

'I know nothing of it, and I shall append no credit to the tale until I do know. He is headstrong, but he answers to a rap.'

Clara's bosom heaved. The speechless insurrection threatened her eyes.

A South-west shower lashed the window-panes and suggested to Dr. Middleton shuddering visions of the channel-passage on board a steamer.

'Corney shall see you: he is a sparkling draught in person; probably illiterate, if I may judge from one interruption of my discourse when he sat opposite me, but lettered enough to respect Learning and write out his prescription: I do not ask more of men or of

Digitized by Google

physicians.' Dr. Middleton said this rising, glancing at the clock and at the back of his hands. '"Quod autem secundum litteras difficillimum esse artificium?" But what after letters is the more difficult practice? "Ego puto medicum." The medicus next to the scholar: though I have not to my recollection required him next me, nor ever expected child of mine to be crying for that milk. Daughter she is—of the unexplained sex: we will send a messenger for Corney. Change, my dear, you will speedily have, to satisfy the most craving of women, if Willoughby, as I suppose, is in the neoteric fashion of spending a honeymoon on a railway: apt image, exposition and perpetuation of the state of mania conducting to the institution! In my time we lay by to brood on happiness; we had no thought of chasing it over a Continent, mistaking hurly-burly clothed in dust for the divinity we sought. A smaller generation sacrifices to excitement. Dust and hurly-burly must perforce be the issue. And that is your modern world. Now, my dear, let us go and wash our hands. Mid-day bells expect immediate attention. They know of no ante-room of assembly.'

Clara stood gathered up, despairing at opportunity lost. He had noticed her contracted shape and her eyes, and had talked magisterially to smother and overbear the something disagreeable prefigured in her appearance.

'You do not despise your girl, father?'

'I do not; I could not; I love her; I love my girl. But you need not sing to me like a gnat to propound that question, my dear.'

'Then, father, tell Sir Willoughby to-day we have to leave to-morrow. You shall return in time for Mrs.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIX Colonel de Craye and Clara Middleton

Mountstuart's dinner. Friends will take us in, the Darletons, the Erpinghams. We can go to Oxford, where you are sure of welcome. A little will recover me. Do not mention doctors. But you see I am nervous. I am quite ashamed of it; I am well enough to laugh at it, only I cannot overcome it; and I feel that a day or two will restore me. Say you will. Say it in First-Lesson-Book language; anything above a primer splits my foolish head to-day.'

Dr. Middleton shrugged, spreading out his arms.

'The office of ambassador from you to Willoughby, Clara? You decree me to the part of ball between two bats. The Play being assured, the prologue is a bladder of wind. I seem to be instructed in one of the mysteries of erotic esotery, yet on my word I am no wiser. If Willoughby is to hear anything from you, he will hear it from your lips.'

'Yes, father, yes. We have differences. I am not fit for contests at present; my head is giddy. I wish to avoid an illness. He and I . . . I accuse myself.'

'There is the bell!' ejaculated Dr. Middleton. 'I'll debate on it with Willoughby.'

'This afternoon?'

'Somewhen, before the dinner-bell. I cannot tie myself to the minute-hand of the clock, my dear child. And let me direct you, for the next occasion when you shall bring the vowels I and A, in verbally detached letters, into collision, that you do not fill the hiatus with so pronounced a Y. It is the vulgarization of our tongue of which I y-accuse you. I do not like my girl to be guilty of it.'

He smiled to moderate the severity of the correction, and kissed her forehead.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIX Colonel de Craye and Clara Middleton

She declared her inability to sit and eat; she went to her room, after begging him very earnestly to send her the assurance that he had spoken. She had not shed a tear, and she rejoiced in her self-control; it whispered to her of true courage when she had given herself such evidence of the reverse.

Shower and sunshine alternated through the half-hours of the afternoon, like a procession of dark and fair holding hands and passing. The shadow came, and she was chill; the light yellow in moisture, and she buried her face not to be caught up by cheerfulness. Believing that her head ached, she afflicted herself with all the heavy symptoms and oppressed her mind so thoroughly that its occupation was to speculate on Lætitia Dale's modest enthusiasm for rural pleasures, for this place especially, with its rich foliage and peeps of scenic peace. The prospect of an escape from it inspired thoughts of a loveable round of life where the sun was not a naked ball of fire but a friend clothed in woodland; where park and meadow swept to well-known features East and West; and distantly circling hills, and the hearts of poor cottagers too—sympathy with whom assured her of goodness—were familiar, homely to the dweller in the place, morning and night. And she had the love of wild flowers, the watchful happiness in the seasons; poets thrilled her, books absorbed. She dwelt strongly on that sincerity of feeling; it gave root in our earth; she needed it as she pressed a hand on her eyeballs, conscious of acting the invalid, though the reasons she had for languishing under headache were so convincing that her brain refused to disbelieve in it and went some way to produce positive throbs. Otherwise she

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIX Colonel de Craye and Clara Middleton

had no excuse for shutting herself in her room. Vernon Whitford would be sceptical. Headache or none, Colonel de Craye must be thinking strangely of her; she had not shown him any sign of illness. His laughter and his talk sang about her and dispersed the fiction; he was the very sea-wind for bracing unstrung nerves. Her ideas reverted to Sir Willoughby, and at once they had no more cohesion than the foam on a torrent-water.

But soon she was undergoing a variation of sentiment. Her maid Barclay brought her this pencilled line from her father:

'Factum est; lætus est; amantium irae, etc.'

That it was done, that Willoughby had put on an air of glad acquiescence, and that her father assumed the existence of a lover's quarrel, was wonderful to her at first sight, simple the succeeding minute. Willoughby indeed must be tired of her, glad of her going. He would know that it was not to return. She was grateful to him for perhaps hinting at the amantium irae, though she rejected the folly of the verse. And she gazed over dear homely country through her windows now. Happy the lady of the place, if happy she can be in her choice! Clara Middleton envied her the double-blossom wild cherry-tree, nothing else. One sprig of it, if it had not faded and gone to dust-colour like crusty Alpine snow in the lower hollows, and then she could depart, bearing away a memory of the best here! Her fiction of the headache pained her no longer. She changed her muslin dress for silk; she was contented with the first bonnet Barclay presented. Amicable toward every one in the house, Willoughby included, she threw up her window, breathed, blessed

Digitized by Google

mankind: and she thought: 'If Willoughby would open his heart to nature, he would be relieved of his wretched opinion of the world.' Nature was then sparkling refreshed in the last drops of a sweeping rain-curtain, favourably disposed for a background to her joyful optimism. A little nibble of hunger within, real hunger, unknown to her of late, added to this healthy view, without precipitating her to appease it; she was more inclined to foster it, for the sake of the sinewy activity of limb it gave her; and in the style of young ladies very light of heart, she went downstairs like a cascade; and like the meteor observed in its vanishing trace she alighted close to Colonel de Craye and entered one of the rooms off the hall.

He cocked an eye at the half-shut door.

Now, you have only to be reminded that it is the habit of the sportive gentleman of easy life, bewildered as he would otherwise be by the tricks, twists and windings of the hunted sex, to parcel out fair women into classes; and some are flyers and some are runners; these birds are wild on the wing, those expose their bosoms to the shot. For him there is no individual woman. He grants her a characteristic only to enrol her in a class. He is our immortal dunce at learning to distinguish her as a personal variety, of a separate growth.

Colonel de Craye's cock of the eye at the door said that he had seen a rageing coquette go behind it. He had his excuse for forming the judgement. She had spoken strangely of the fall of his wedding present, strangely of Willoughby; or there was a sound of strangeness in an allusion to her appointed husband;

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIX Colonel de Craye and Clara Middleton

and she had treated Willoughby strangely when they met. Above all, her word about Flitch was curious. And then that look of hers! And subsequently she transferred her polite attentions to Willoughby's friend. After a charming colloquy, the sweetest give and take rattle he had ever enjoyed with a girl, she developed headache to avoid him; and next she developed blindness, for the same purpose.

He was feeling hurt, but considered it preferable to feel challenged.

Miss Middleton came out of another door. She had seen him when she had passed him and when it was too late to convey her recognition; and now she addressed him with an air of having bowed as she went by.

'No one?' she said. 'Am I alone in the house?'

'There is a figure naught,' said he, 'but it's as good as annihilated, and no figure at all, if you put yourself on the wrong side of it, and wish to be alone in the house.'

'Where is Willoughby?'

'Away on business.'

'Riding?'

'Achmet is the horse, and pray don't let him be sold, Miss Middleton. I am deputed to attend on you.'

'I should like a stroll.'

'Are you perfectly restored?'

'Perfectly.'

'Strong?'

'I was never better.'

'It was the answer of the ghost of the wicked old man's wife when she came to persuade him he had one chance remaining. Then, says he, I'll believe in

Digitized by Google

heaven if ye 'll stop that bottle, and hurls it; and the bottle broke and he committed suicide, not without suspicion of her laying a trap for him. These showers curling away and leaving sweet scents, are divine, Miss Middleton. I have the privilege of the Christian name on the nuptial-day. This park of Willoughby's is one of the best things in England. There 's a glimpse over the lake that smokes of a corner of Killarney; tempts the eye to dream, I mean.' De Craye wound his finger spirally upward like a smoke-wreath. 'Are you for Irish scenery?'

'Irish, English, Scottish.'

'All 's one so long as it 's beautiful: yes; you speak for me. Cosmopolitanism of races is a different affair. I beg leave to doubt the true union of some; Irish and Saxon, for example, let Cupid be master of the ceremonies and the dwelling-place of the happy couple at the mouth of a Cornucopia. Yet I have seen a flower of Erin worn by a Saxon gentleman proudly; and the Hibernian courting a Rowena! So we 'll undo what I said, and consider it cancelled.'

'Are you of the rebel party, Colonel de Craye?'

'I am Protestant and Conservative, Miss Middleton.

'I have not a head for politics.'

'The political heads I have seen would tempt me to that opinion.'

'Did Willoughby say when he would be back?'

'He named no particular time. Dr. Middleton and Mr. Whitford are in the library upon a battle of the books.'

'Happy battle!'

'You are accustomed to scholars. They are rather intolerant of us poor fellows.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIX Colonel de Craye and Clara Middleton

'Of ignorance perhaps; not of persons.'

'Your father educated you himself, I presume.'

'He gave me as much Latin as I could take. The fault is mine that it is little.'

'Greek?'

'A little Greek.'

'Ah! And you carry it like a feather.'

'Because it is so light.'

'Miss Middleton, I could sit down to be instructed, old as I am. When women beat us, I verily believe we are the most beaten dogs in existence. You like the theatre?'

'Ours?'

'Acting, then.'

'Good acting, of course.'

'May I venture to say you would act admirably?'

'The venture is bold, for I have never tried.'

'Let me see; there is Miss Dale and Mr. Whitford: you and I; sufficient for a two-act piece. THE IRISHMAN IN SPAIN would do.' He bent to touch the grass as she stepped on it. 'The lawn is wet.'

She signified that she had no dread of wet, and said: 'English women afraid of the weather might as well be shut up.'

De Craye proceeded: 'Patrick O'Neill passes over from Hibernia to Iberia, a disinherited son of a father in the claws of the lawyers, with a letter of introduction to Don Beltran d'Arragon, a Grandee of the First Class, who has a daughter, Doña Serafina (Miss Middleton), the proudest beauty of her day, in the custody of a dueña (Miss Dale), and plighted to Don Fernan, of the Guzman family (Mr. Whitford). There you have our dramatis personae.'

Digitized by Google

'You are Patrick?'

'Patrick himself. And I lose my letter, and I stand on the Prado of Madrid with the last portrait of Britannia in the palm of my hand, and crying in the purest brogue of my native land: "It's all through dropping a letter I'm here in Iberia instead of Hibernia, worse luck to the spelling!"'

'But Patrick will be sure to aspirate the initial letter of Hibernia.'

'That is clever criticism, upon my word, Miss Middleton! So he would. And there we have two letters dropped. But he'd do it in a groan, so that it wouldn't count for more than a ghost of one; and everything goes on the stage, since it's only the laugh we want on the brink of the action. Besides you are to suppose the performance before a London audience, who have a native opposition to the aspirate and wouldn't bear to hear him spoil a joke, as if he were a lord or a constable. It's an instinct of the English democracy. So with my bit of coin turning over and over in an undecided way, whether it shall commit suicide to supply me a supper, I behold a pair of Spanish eyes like violet lightnings in the black heavens of that favoured clime. Won't you have violet?'

'Violet forbids my impersonation.'

'But the lustre on black is dark violet blue.'

'You remind me that I have no pretension to black.'

Colonel de Craye permitted himself to take a flitting gaze at Miss Middleton's eyes. 'Chestnut,' he said. 'Well, and Spain is the land of chestnuts.'

'Then it follows that I am a daughter of Spain.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIX Colonel de Craye and Clara Middleton

'Clearly.'

'Logically!'

'By positive deduction.'

'And how do I behold Patrick?'

'As one looks upon a beast of burden.'

'Oh!'

Miss Middleton's exclamation was louder than the matter of the dialogue seemed to require. She caught her hands up.

In the line of the outer extremity of the rhododendron, screened from the house windows, young Crossjay lay at his length, with his head resting on a doubled arm, and his ivy-wreathed hat on his cheek, just where she had left him, commanding him to stay. Half-way toward him up the lawn, she saw the poor boy, and the spur of that pitiful sight set her gliding swiftly. Colonel de Craye followed, pulling an end of his moustache.

Crossjay jumped to his feet.

'My dear, dear Crossjay!' she addressed him and reproached him. 'And how hungry you must be! And you must be drenched! This is really too bad.'

'You told me to wait here,' said Crossjay, in shy self-defence.

'I did, and you should not have done it, foolish boy! I told him to wait for me here before luncheon, Colonel de Craye, and the foolish foolish boy!—he has had nothing to eat and he must have been wet through two or three times:—because I did not come to him!'

'Quite right. And the lava might overflow him and take the mould of him, like the sentinel at Pompeii, if he's of the true stuff.'

Digitized by Google

'He may have caught cold, he may have a fever.'

'He was under your orders to stay.'

'I know, and I cannot forgive myself. Run in, Crossjay, and change your clothes. Oh! run, run to Mrs. Montague, and get her to give you a warm bath, and tell her from me to prepare some dinner for you. And change every garment you have. This is unpardonable of me. I said—"not for politics"!—I begin to think I have not a head for anything. But could it be imagined that Crossjay would not move for the dinner-bell! through all that rain! I forgot you, Crossjay. I am so sorry; so sorry! You shall make me pay any forfeit you like. Remember I am deep deep in your debt. And now let me see you run fast. You shall come in to dessert this evening.'

Crossjay did not run. He touched her hand.

'You said something?'

'What did I say, Crossjay?'

'You promised.'

'What did I promise?'

'Something.'

'Name it, dear boy.'

He mumbled '. . . kiss me.'

Clara plumped down on him, enveloped him and kissed him.

The affectionately remorseful impulse was too quick for a conventional note of admonition to arrest her from paying that portion of her debt. When she had sped him off to Mrs. Montague, she was in a blush.

'Dear, dear Crossjay!' she said, sighing.

'Yes, he's a good lad,' remarked the colonel. 'The fellow may well be a faithful soldier and stick to his

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIX Colonel de Craye and Clara Middleton

post, if he receives promise of such a solde. He is a great favourite with you.'

'He is. You will do him a service by persuading Willoughby to send him to one of those men who get boys through their naval examination. And, Colonel de Craye, will you be kind enough to ask at the dinner-table that Crossjay may come in to dessert?'

'Certainly,' said he, wondering.

'And will you look after him while you are here? See that no one spoils him. If you could get him away before you leave, it would be much to his advantage. He is born for the navy and should be preparing to enter it now.'

'Certainly, certainly,' said De Craye, wondering more.

'I thank you in advance.'

'Shall I not be usurping . . .?'

'No, we leave to-morrow.'

'For a day?'

'For longer.'

'Two?'

'It will be longer.'

'A week? I shall not see you again?'

'I fear, not.'

Colonel de Craye controlled his astonishment; he smothered a sensation of veritable pain, and amiably said: 'I feel a blow, but I am sure you would not willingly strike. We are all involved in the regrets.'

Miss Middleton spoke of having to see Mrs. Montague, the housekeeper, with reference to the bath for Crossjay, and stepped off the grass. He bowed, watched her a moment, and for parallel reasons, running close enough to hit one mark, he commiserated

Digitized by Google

his friend Willoughby. The winning or the losing of that young lady struck him as equally lamentable for Willoughby.

CHAPTER XX

An Aged and a Great Wine

The leisurely promenade up and down the lawn with ladies and deferential gentlemen, in anticipation of the dinner-bell, was Dr. Middleton's evening pleasure. He walked as one who had formerly danced (in Apollo's time and the young God Cupid's), elastic on the muscles of the calf and foot, bearing his broad iron-grey head in grand elevation. The hard labour of the day approved the cooling exercise and the crowning refreshments of French cookery and wines of known vintages. He was happy at that hour in dispensing wisdom or nugae to his hearers, like the Western sun, whose habit it is, when he is fairly treated, to break out in quiet splendours, which by no means exhaust his treasury. Blest indeed above his fellows, by the height of the bow-winged bird in a fair weather sunset sky above the pecking sparrow, is he that ever in the recurrent evening of his day sees the best of it ahead and soon to come. He has the rich reward of a youth and manhood of virtuous living. Dr. Middleton misdoubted the future as well as the past of the man who did not, in becoming gravity, exult to dine. That man he deemed unfit for this world and the next.

An example of the good fruit of temperance, he had

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XX
An Aged and a Great Wine

a comfortable pride in his digestion, and his political sentiments were attuned by his veneration of the Powers rewarding virtue. We must have a stable world where this is to be done.

The Rev. Doctor was a fine old picture; a specimen of art peculiarly English; combining in himself piety and epicurism, learning and gentlemanliness, with good room for each and a seat at one another's table: for the rest, a strong man, an athlete in his youth, a keen reader of facts and no reader of persons, genial, a giant at a task, a steady worker besides, but easily discomposed. He loved his daughter and he feared her. However much he liked her character, the dread of her sex and age was constantly present to warn him that he was not tied to perfect sanity while the damsel Clara remained unmarried. Her mother had been an amiable woman, of the poetical temperament nevertheless, too enthusiastic, imaginative, impulsive, for the repose of a sober scholar; an admirable woman, still, as you see, a woman, a firework. The girl resembled her. Why should she wish to run away from Patterne Hall for a single hour? Simply because she was of the sex born mutable and explosive. A husband was her proper custodian, justly relieving a father. With demagogues abroad and daughters at home, philosophy is needed for us to keep erect. Let the girl be Cicero's Tullia: well, she dies! The choicest of them will furnish us examples of a strange perversity.

Miss Dale was beside Dr. Middleton. Clara came to them and took the other side.

'I was telling Miss Dale that the signal for your subjection is my enfranchisement,' he said to her,

Digitized by Google

sighing and smiling. 'We know the date. The date of an event to come certifies to it as a fact to be counted on.'

'Are you anxious to lose me?' Clara faltered.

'My dear, you have planted me on a field where I am to expect the trumpet, and when it blows I shall be quit of my nerves, no more.'

Clara found nothing to seize on for a reply in these words. She thought upon the silence of Lætitia.

Sir Willoughby advanced, appearing in a cordial mood.

'I need not ask you whether you are better,' he said to Clara, sparkled to Lætitia, and raised a key to the level of Dr. Middleton's breast, remarking: 'I am going down to my inner cellar.'

'An inner cellar!' exclaimed the doctor.

'Sacred from the butler. It is interdicted to Stoneman. Shall I offer myself as guide to you? My cellars are worth a visit.'

'Cellars are not catacombs. They are, if rightly constructed, rightly considered, cloisters, where the bottle meditates on joys to bestow, not on dust misused! Have you anything great?'

'A wine aged ninety.'

'Is it associated with your pedigree, that you pronounce the age with such assurance?'

'My grandfather inherited it.'

'Your grandfather, Sir Willoughby, had meritorious offspring, not to speak of generous progenitors. What would have happened, had it fallen into the female line! I shall be glad to accompany you. Port? Hermitage?'

'Port.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XX
An Aged and a Great Wine

'Ah! We are in England!'

'There will just be time,' said Sir Willoughby, inducing Dr. Middleton to step out.

A chirrup was in the Rev. Doctor's tone: 'Hocks, too, have compassed age. I have tasted senior Hocks. Their flavours are as a brook of many voices; they have depth also. Senatorial Port! we say. We cannot say that of any other wine. Port is deep-sea deep. It is in its flavour deep; mark the difference. It is like a classic tragedy, organic in conception. An ancient Hermitage has the light of the antique; the merit that it can grow to an extreme old age; a merit. Neither of Hermitage nor of Hock can you say that it is the blood of those long years, retaining the strength of youth with the wisdom of age. To Port for that! Port is our noblest legacy! Observe, I do not compare the wines; I distinguish the qualities. Let them live together for our enrichment; they are not rivals like the Idæan Three. Were they rivals, a fourth would challenge them. Burgundy has great genius. It does wonders within its period; it does all except to keep up in the race; it is short-lived. An aged Burgundy runs with a beardless Port. I cherish the fancy that Port speaks the sentences of wisdom, Burgundy sings the inspired Ode. Or put it, that Port is the Homeric hexameter, Burgundy the Pindaric dithyramb. What do you say?'

'The comparison is excellent, sir.'

'The distinction, you would remark. Pindar astounds. But his elder brings us the more sustaining cup. One is a fountain of prodigious ascent. One is the unsounded purple sea of marching billows.'

'A very fine distinction.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XX
An Aged and a Great Wine

'I conceive you to be now commending the similes. They pertain to the time of the first critics of those poets. Touch the Greeks, and you can nothing new: all has been said: "Graiis, . . . præter laudem, nullius avaris." Genius dedicated to Fame is immortal. We, sir, dedicate genius to the cloacaline floods. We do not address the unforgetting Gods, but the popular stomach.'

Sir Willoughby was patient. He was about as accordantly coupled with Dr. Middleton in discourse as a drum duetting with a bass-viol; and when he struck in he received correction from the pædagogue-instrument. If he thumped affirmative or negative, he was wrong. However, he knew scholars to be an unmannered species; and the Doctor's learnedness would be a subject to dilate on.

In the cellar, it was the turn for the drum. Dr. Middleton was tongue-tied there. Sir Willoughby gave the history of his wine in heads of chapters; whence it came to the family originally, and how it had come down to him in the quantity to be seen. 'Curiously, my grandfather, who inherited it, was a water-drinker. My father died early.'

'Indeed! Dear me!' the Doctor ejaculated in astonishment and condolence. The former glanced at the contrariety of man, the latter embraced his melancholy destiny.

He was impressed with respect for the family. This cool vaulted cellar, and the central square block, or enceinte, where the thick darkness was not penetrated by the intruding lamp, but rather took it as an eye, bore witness to forethoughtful practical solidity in the man who had built the house on such foundations.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XX
An Aged and a Great Wine

A house having a great wine stored below, lives in our imaginations as a joyful house fast and splendidly rooted in the soil. And imagination has a place for the heir of the house. His grandfather a water-drinker, his father dying early, present circumstances to us arguing predestination to an illustrious heirship and career. Dr. Middleton's musings were coloured by the friendly vision of glasses of the great wine; his mind was festive; it pleased him, and he chose to indulge in his whimsical-robustious, grandiose-airy style of thinking: from which the festive mind will sometimes take a certain print that we cannot obliterate immediately. Expectation is grateful, you know; in the mood of gratitude we are waxen. And he was a self-humouring gentleman.

He liked Sir Willoughby's tone in ordering the servant at his heels to take up 'those two bottles': it prescribed, without overdoing it, a proper amount of caution, and it named an agreeable number.

Watching the man's hand keenly, he said:

'But here is the misfortune of a thing super-excellent:—not more than one in twenty will do it justice.'

Sir Willoughby replied: 'Very true, sir, and I think we may pass over the nineteen.'

'Women, for example: and most men.'

'This wine would be a sealed book to them.'

'I believe it would. It would be a grievous waste.'

'Vernon is a claret-man: and so is Horace de Craye. They are both below the mark of this wine. They will join the ladies. Perhaps you and I, sir, might remain together.'

'With the utmost good will on my part.'

Digitized by Google

'I am anxious for your verdict, sir.'

CHAPTER XX
An Aged and a Great Wine

'You shall have it, sir, and not out of harmony with the chorus preceding me, I can predict. Cool, not frigid.' Dr. Middleton summed the attributes of the cellar on quitting it: 'North side and South. No musty damp. A pure air! Everything requisite. One might lie down oneself and keep sweet here.'

Of all our venerable British of the two Isles professing a suckling attachment to an ancient port-wine, lawyer, doctor, squire, rosy admiral, city merchant, the classic scholar is he whose blood is most nuptial to the webbed bottle. The reason must be, that he is full of the old poets. He has their spirit to sing with, and the best that Time has done on earth to feed it. He may also perceive a resemblance in the wine to the studious mind, which is the obverse of our mortality, and throws off acids and crusty particles in the piling of the years, until it is fulgent by clarity. Port hymns to his conservatism. It is magical: at one sip he is off swimming in the purple flood of the ever-youthful antique.

By comparison, then, the enjoyment of others is brutish; they have not the soul for it; but he is worthy of the wine, as are poets of Beauty. In truth, these should be severally apportioned to them, scholar and poet, as his own good thing. Let it be so.

Meanwhile Dr. Middleton sipped.

After the departure of the ladies, Sir Willoughby had practised a studied curtness upon Vernon and Horace.

'You drink claret,' he remarked to them, passing it round. 'Port, I think, Dr. Middleton? The wine before you may serve for a preface. We shall have *your* wine in five minutes.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XX
An Aged and a Great Wine

The claret jug empty, Sir Willoughby offered to send for more. De Craye was languid over the question. Vernon rose from the table.

'We have a bottle of Dr. Middleton's Port coming in,' Willoughby said to him.

'Mine, you call it?' cried the Rev. Doctor.

'It 's a royal wine, that won't suffer sharing,' said Vernon.

'We 'll be with you, if you go into the billiard-room, Vernon.'

'I shall hurry my drinking of good wine for no man,' said the Rev. Doctor.

'Horace?'

'I'm beneath it, ephemeral, Willoughby. I am going to the ladies.'

Vernon and De Craye retired upon the arrival of the wine; and Dr. Middleton sipped. He sipped and looked at the owner of it.

'Some thirty dozen?' he said.

'Fifty.'

The Doctor nodded humbly.

'I shall remember, sir,' his host addressed him, 'whenever I have the honour of entertaining you, I am cellarer of that wine.'

The Rev. Doctor set down his glass. 'You have, sir, in some sense, an enviable post. It is a responsible one, if that be a blessing. On you it devolves to retard the day of the last dozen.'

'Your opinion of the wine is favourable, sir?'

'I will say this:—shallow souls run to rhapsody:—I will say, that I am consoled for not having lived ninety years back, or at any period but the present, by this one glass of your ancestral wine.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XX
An Aged and a Great Wine

'I am careful of it,' Sir Willoughby said modestly; 'still its natural destination is to those who can appreciate it. You do, sir.'

'Still, my good friend, still! It is a charge: it is a possession, but part in trusteeship. Though we cannot declare it an entailed estate, our consciences are in some sort pledged that it shall be a succession not too considerably diminished.'

'You will not object to drink it, sir, to the health of your grandchildren. And may you live to toast them in it on their marriage-day!'

'You colour the idea of a prolonged existence in seductive hues. Ha! It is a wine for Tithonus. This wine would speed him to the rosy Morning—aha!'

'I will undertake to sit you through it up to morning,' said Sir Willoughby, innocent of the Bacchic nuptiality of the allusion.

Dr. Middleton eyed the decanter. There is a grief in gladness, for a premonition of our mortal state. The amount of wine in the decanter did not promise to sustain the starry roof of night and greet the dawn. 'Old wine, my friend, denies us the full bottle!'

'Another bottle is to follow.'

'No!'

'It is ordered.'

'I protest.'

'It is uncorked.'

'I entreat.'

'It is decanted.'

'I submit. But, mark, it must be honest partnership. You are my worthy host, sir, on that stipulation. Note the superiority of wine over Venus!—I may say, the magnanimity of wine; our jealousy turns

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XX
An Aged and a Great Wine

on him that will not share! But the corks, Willoughby. The corks excite my amazement.'

'The corking is examined at regular intervals. I remember the occurrence in my father's time. I have seen to it once.'

'It must be perilous as an operation for tracheotomy; which I should assume it to resemble in surgical skill and firmness of hand, not to mention the imminent gasp of the patient.'

A fresh decanter was placed before the doctor.

He said: 'I have but a girl to give!' He was melted.

Sir Willoughby replied: 'I take her for the highest prize this world affords.'

'I have beaten some small stock of Latin into her head, and a note of Greek. She contains a savour of the classics. I hoped once . . . but she is a girl. The nymph of the woods is in her. Still she will bring you her flower-cup of Hippocrene. She has that aristocracy —the noblest. She is fair; a Beauty, some have said, who judge not by lines. Fair to me, Willoughby! She is my sky. There were applicants. In Italy she was besought of me. She has no history. You are the first heading of the chapter. With you she will have her one tale, as it should be. "Mulier tum bene olet," you know. Most fragrant she that smells of naught. She goes to you from me, from me alone, from her father to her husband. "Ut flos in septis secretus nascitur hortis." . . . He murmured on the lines to, "Sic virgo, dum . . .' I shall feel the parting. She goes to one who will have my pride in her, and more. I will add, who will be envied. Mr. Whitford must write you a Carmen Nuptiale.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XX
An Aged and a Great Wine

The heart of the unfortunate gentleman listening to Dr. Middleton set in for irregular leaps. His offended temper broke away from the image of Clara, revealing her as he had seen her in the morning beside Horace de Craye, distressingly sweet; sweet with the breezy radiance of an English soft-breathing day; sweet with sharpness of young sap. Her eyes, her lips, her fluttering dress that played happy mother across her bosom, giving peeps of the veiled twins; and her laughter, her slim figure, peerless carriage, all her terrible sweetness touched his wound to the smarting quick.

Her wish to be free of him was his anguish. In his pain he thought sincerely. When the pain was easier he muffled himself in the idea of her jealousy of Lætitia Dale, and deemed the wish a fiction. But she had expressed it. That was the wound he sought to comfort; for the double reason, that he could love her better after punishing her, and that to meditate on doing so masked the fear of losing her—the dread abyss she had succeeded in forcing his nature to shudder at as a giddy edge possibly near, in spite of his arts of self-defence.

'What I shall do to-morrow evening!' he exclaimed. 'I do not care to fling a bottle to Colonel de Craye and Vernon. I cannot open one for myself. To sit with the ladies will be sitting in the cold for me. When do you bring me back my bride, sir?'

'My dear Willoughby!' The Rev. Doctor puffed, composed himself, and sipped. 'The expedition is an absurdity. I am unable to see the aim of it. She had a headache, vapours. They are over, and she will show a return of good sense. I have ever maintained

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XX
An Aged and a Great Wine

that nonsense is not to be encouraged in girls. *I* can put my foot on it. My arrangements are for staying here a further ten days, in the terms of your hospitable invitation. And I stay.'

'I applaud your resolution, sir. Will you prove firm?'

'I am never false to my engagement, Willoughby.'

'Not under pressure.'

'Under no pressure.'

'Persuasion, I should have said.'

'Certainly not. The weakness is in the yielding, either to persuasion or to pressure. The latter brings weight to bear on us; the former blows at our want of it.'

'You gratify me, Dr. Middleton, and relieve me.'

'I cordially dislike a breech in good habits, Willoughby. But I do remember—was I wrong?—informing Clara that you appeared light-hearted in regard to a departure, or gap in a visit, that was not, I must confess, to my liking.'

'Simply, my dear Doctor, your pleasure was my pleasure; but make my pleasure yours, and you remain to crack many a bottle with your son-in-law.'

'Excellently said. You have a courtly speech, Willoughby. I can imagine you to conduct a lover's quarrel with a politeness to read a lesson to well-bred damsels. Aha?'

'Spare me the futility of the quarrel.'

'All 's well?'

'Clara,' replied Sir Willoughby, in dramatic epigram, 'is perfection.'

'I rejoice,' the Rev. Doctor responded; taught thus

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XX
An Aged and a Great Wine

to understand that the lover's quarrel between his daughter and his host was at an end.

He left the table a little after eleven o'clock. A short dialogue ensued upon the subject of the ladies. They must have gone to bed? Why yes; of course they must. It is good that they should go to bed early to preserve their complexions for us. Ladies are creation's glory, but they are anti-climax, following a wine of a century old. They are anti-climax, recoil, cross-current; morally, they are repentance, penance; imagerially, the frozen North on the young brown buds bursting to green. What know they of a critic in the palate, and a frame all revelry! And mark you, revelry in sobriety, containment in exultation: classic revelry. Can they, dear though they be to us, light up candelabras in the brain, to illuminate all history and solve the secret of the destiny of man? They cannot; they cannot sympathize with them that can. So therefore this division is between us; yet are we not turbaned Orientals, nor are they inmates of the harem. We are not Moslem. Be assured of it, in the contemplation of the table's decanter.

Dr. Middleton said: 'Then I go straight to bed.'

'I will conduct you to your door, sir,' said his host.

The piano was heard. Dr. Middleton laid his hand on the banisters, and remarked: 'The ladies must have gone to bed?'

Vernon came out of the library and was hailed: 'Fellow-student!'

He waved a good-night to the Doctor and said to Willoughby: 'The ladies are in the drawing-room.'

'I am on my way upstairs,' was the reply.

'Solitude and sleep, after such a wine as that; and

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XX
An Aged and a Great Wine

forefend us human society!' the Doctor shouted. 'But, Willoughby!'

'Sir.'

'*One* to-morrow!'

'You dispose of the cellar, sir.'

'I am fitter to drive the horses of the sun. I would rigidly counsel, one, and no more. We have made a breach in the fiftieth dozen. Daily one, will preserve us from having to name the fortieth quite so unseasonably. The couple of bottles per diem prognosticates disintegration, with its accompanying recklessness. Constitutionally, let me add, I bear three. I speak for posterity.'

During Dr. Middleton's allocution the ladies issued from the drawing-room, Clara foremost, for she had heard her father's voice, and desired to ask him this in reference to their departure: 'Papa, will you tell me the hour to-morrow?'

She ran up the stairs to kiss him, saying again: 'When will you be ready to-morrow morning?'

Dr. Middleton announced a stoutly deliberative mind in the bugle-notes of a repeated ahem. He bethought him of replying in his doctorial tongue. Clara's eager face admonished him to brevity: it began to look starved. Intruding on his vision of the houris couched in the inner cellar to be the reward of valiant men, it annoyed him. His brows joined. He said: 'I shall not be ready to-morrow morning.'

'In the afternoon?'

'Nor in the afternoon.'

'When?'

'My dear, I am ready for bed at this moment, and know of no other readiness. Ladies,' he bowed to the

Digitized by Google

group in the hall below him, 'may fair dreams pay court to you this night!'

Sir Willoughby had hastily descended and shaken the hands of the ladies, directed Horace de Craye to the laboratory for a smoking-room, and returned to Dr. Middleton. Vexed by the scene, uncertain of his temper if he stayed with Clara, for whom he had arranged that her disappointment should take place on the morrow, in his absence, he said; 'Good night, good night,' to her, with due fervour, bending over her flaccid finger-tips; then offered his arm to the Rev. Doctor.

'Ay, son Willoughby, in friendliness, if you will, though I am a man to bear my load,' the father of the stupefied girl addressed him. 'Candles, I believe, are on the first landing. Good night, my love. Clara!'

'Papa!'

'Good night.'

'Oh!' she lifted her breast with the interjection, standing in shame of the curtained conspiracy and herself, 'good night.'

Her father wound up the stairs. She stepped down.

'There was an understanding that papa and I should go to London to-morrow early,' she said unconcernedly to the ladies, and her voice was clear, but her face too legible. De Craye was heartily unhappy at the sight.

CHAPTER XXI

Clara's Meditations

Two were sleepless that night: Miss Middleton and Colonel de Craye.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXI
Clara's Meditations

She was in a fever, lying like stone, with her brain burning. Quick natures run out to calamity in any little shadow of it flung before. Terrors of apprehension drive them. They stop not short of the uttermost when they are on the wings of dread. A frown means tempest, a wind wreck; to see fire is to be seized by it. When it is the approach of their loathing that they fear, they are in the tragedy of the embrace at a breath; and then is the wrestle between themselves and horror; between themselves and evil, which promises aid; themselves and weakness, which calls on evil; themselves and the better part of them, which whispers no beguilement.

The false course she had taken through sophistical cowardice appalled the girl; she was lost. The advantage taken of it by Willoughby put on the form of strength, and made her feel abject, reptilious; she was lost, carried away on the flood of the cataract. He had won her father for an ally. Strangely, she knew not how, he had succeeded in swaying her father, who had previously not more than tolerated him. 'Son Willoughby' on her father's lips meant something that scenes and scenes would have to struggle with, to the outwearying of her father and herself. She revolved the 'Son Willoughby' through moods of stupefaction, contempt, revolt, subjection. It meant that she was vanquished. It meant that her father's esteem for her was forfeited. She saw him a gigantic image of discomposure.

Her recognition of her cowardly feebleness brought the brood of fatalism. What was the right of so miserable a creature as she to excite disturbance, let her fortunes be good or ill? It would be quieter to

Digitized by Google

float, kinder to everybody. Thank heaven for the chances of a short life! Once in a net, desperation is graceless. We may be brutes in our earthly destinies; in our endurance of them we need not be brutish.

She was now in the luxury of passivity, when we throw our burden on the Powers above, and do not love them. The need to love them drew her out of it, that she might strive with the unbearable, and by sheer striving, even though she were graceless, come to love them humbly. It is here that the seed of good teaching supports a soul; for the condition might be mapped, and where kismet whispers us to shut eyes, and instruction bids us look up, is at a well-marked cross-road of the contest.

Quick of sensation, but not courageously resolved, she perceived how blunderingly she had acted. For a punishment, it seemed to her that she who had not known her mind must learn to conquer her nature, and submit. She had accepted Willoughby; therefore she accepted him. The fact became a matter of the past, past debating.

In the abstract, this contemplation of circumstances went well. A plain duty lay in her way. And then a disembodied thought flew round her, comparing her with Vernon to her discredit. He had for years borne much that was distasteful to him, for the purpose of studying, and with his poor income helping the poorer than himself. She dwelt on him in pity and envy; he had lived in this place, and so must she; and he had not been dishonoured by his modesty: he had not failed of self-control, because he had a life within. She was almost imagining she might imitate him, when

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXI
Clara's Meditations

the clash of a sharp physical thought: 'The difference! the difference!' told her she was woman and never could submit. Can a woman have an inner life apart from him she is yoked to? She tried to nestle deep away in herself: in some corner where the abstract view had comforted her, to flee from thinking as her feminine blood directed. It was a vain effort. The difference, the cruel fate, the defencelessness of women, pursued her, strung her to wild horses' backs, tossed her on savage wastes. In her place duty was shame: hence, it could not be broadly duty. That intolerable difference proscribed the word.

But the fire of a brain burning high and kindling everything, lit up herself against herself:—Was one so volatile as she a person with a will?—Were they not a multitude of flitting wishes, that she took for a will?—Was she, feather-headed that she was, a person to make a stand on physical pride?—If she could yield her hand without reflection (as she conceived she had done, from incapacity to conceive herself doing it reflectively), was she much better than purchaseable stuff that has nothing to say to the bargain?

Furthermore, said her incandescent reason, she had not suspected such art of cunning in Willoughby. Then might she not be deceived altogether—might she not have misread him? Stronger than she had fancied, might he not be likewise more estimable? The world was favourable to him: he was prized by his friends.

She reviewed him. It was all in one flash. It was not much less intentionally favourable than the world's review and that of his friends, but, beginning with the

Digitized by Google

idea of them, she recollected—heard Willoughby's voice pronouncing his opinion of his friends and the world; of Vernon Whitford and Colonel de Craye, for example, and of men and women. An undefined agreement to have the same regard for him as his friends and the world had, provided that he kept at the same distance from her, was the termination of this phase, occupying about a minute in time, and reached through a series of intensely vivid pictures: —his face, at her petition to be released, lowering behind them for a background and a comment.

CHAPTER XXI
Clara's Meditations

'I cannot! I cannot!' she cried aloud; and it struck her that her repulsion was a holy warning. Better be graceless than a loathing wife: better appear inconsistent. Why should she not appear such as she was?

Why? We answer that question usually in angry reliance on certain superb qualities, injured fine qualities of ours undiscovered by the world, not much more than suspected by ourselves, which are still our fortress, where pride sits at home, solitary and impervious as an octogenarian conservative. But it is not possible to answer it so when the brain is rageing like a pine-torch and the devouring illumination leaves not a spot of our nature covert. The aspect of her weakness was unrelieved, and frightened her back to her loathing. From her loathing, as soon as her sensations had quickened to realize it, she was hurled on her weakness. She was graceless, she was inconsistent, she was volatile, she was unprincipled, she was worse than a prey to wickedness—capable of it; she was only waiting to be misled. Nay, the idea of being misled suffused

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXI
Clara's Meditations

her with languor; for then the battle would be over and she a happy weed of the sea, no longer suffering those tugs at the roots, but leaving it to the sea to heave and contend. She would be like Constantia then: like her in her fortunes: never so brave, she feared.

Perhaps very like Constantia in her fortunes!

Poor troubled bodies waking up in the night to behold visually the spectre cast forth from the perplexed machinery inside them, stare at it for a space, till touching consciousness they dive down under the sheets with fish-like alacrity. Clara looked at her thought, and suddenly headed downward in a crimson gulf.

She must have obtained absolution, or else it was oblivion, below. Soon after the plunge, her first object of meditation was Colonel de Craye. She thought of him calmly: he seemed a refuge. He was very nice, he was a holiday character. His lithe figure, neat firm footing of the stag, swift intelligent expression, and his ready frolicsomeness, pleasant humour, cordial temper, and his Irishry, whereon he was at liberty to play, as on the emblem harp of the Isle, were soothing to think of. The suspicion that she tricked herself with this calm observation of him was dismissed. Issuing out of torture, her young nature eluded the irradiating brain, in search of refreshment, and she luxuriated at a feast in considering him—shower on a parched land that he was! He spread new air abroad. She had no reason to suppose he was not a good man: she could securely think of him. Besides he was bound by his prospective office in support of his friend

Digitized by Google

Willoughby to be quite harmless. And besides (you are not to expect logical sequences) the showery refreshment in thinking of him lay in the sort of assurance it conveyed, that the more she thought, the less would he be likely to figure as an obnoxious official: that is, as the man to do by Willoughby at the altar what her father would under the supposition, be doing by her. Her mind reposed on Colonel de Craye.

His name was Horace. Her father had worked with her at Horace. She knew most of the Odes and some of the Satires and Epistles of the poet. They reflected benevolent beams on the gentleman of the poet's name. He too was vivacious, had fun, common sense, elegance; loved rusticity, he said, sighed for a country life, fancied retiring to Canada to cultivate his own domain; 'modus agri non ita magnus': a delight. And he, too, when in the country sighed for town. There were strong features of resemblance. He had hinted in fun at not being rich. 'Quæ virtus et quanta sit vivere parvo.' But that quotation applied to and belonged to Vernon Whitford. Even so little disarranged her meditations.

She would have thought of Vernon, as her instinct of safety prompted, had not his exactions been excessive. He proposed to help her with advice only. She was to do everything for herself, do and dare everything, decide upon everything. He told her flatly that so would she learn to know her own mind; and flatly that it was her penance. She had gained nothing by breaking down and pouring herself out to him. He would have her bring Willoughby and her father face to face, and be witness of their interview

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXI. Clara's Meditations

—herself the theme. What alternative was there?—obedience to the word she had pledged. He talked of patience, of self-examination and patience. But all of her—she was all marked *urgent*. This house was a cage, and the world—her brain was a cage, until she could obtain her prospect of freedom.

As for the house, she might leave it; yonder was the dawn.

She went to her window to gaze at the first colour along the grey. Small satisfaction came of gazing at that or at herself. She shunned glass and sky. One and the other stamped her as a slave in a frame. It seemed to her she had been so long in this place that she was fixed here: it was her world, and to imagine an Alp, was like seeking to get back to childhood. Unless a miracle intervened, here she would have to pass her days. Men are so little chivalrous now that no miracle ever intervenes. Consequently she was doomed.

She took a pen and began a letter to a dear friend, Lucy Darleton, a promised bridesmaid, bidding her countermand orders for her bridal dress, and purposing a tour in Switzerland. She wrote of the mountain country with real abandonment to imagination. It became a visioned loophole of escape. She rose and clasped a shawl over her night-dress to ward off chilliness, and sitting to the table again, could not produce a word. The lines she had written were condemned: they were ludicrously inefficient. The letter was torn to pieces. She stood very clearly doomed.

After a fall of tears, upon looking at the scraps, she dressed herself, and sat by the window and watched

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXI
Clara's Meditations

the blackbird on the lawn as he hopped from shafts of dewy sunlight to the long-stretched dewy tree-shadows, considering in her mind that dark dews are more meaningful than bright, the beauty of the dews of woods more sweet than meadow-dews. It signified only that she was quieter. She had gone through her crisis in the anticipation of it. That is how quick natures will often be cold and hard, or not much moved, when the positive crisis arrives, and why it is that they are prepared for astonishing leaps over the gradations which should render their conduct comprehensible to us, if not excuseable. She watched the blackbird throw up his head stiff, and peck to right and left, dangling the worm each side his orange beak. Speckle-breasted thrushes were at work, and a wagtail than ran as with Clara's own little steps. Thrush and blackbird flew to the nest. They had wings. The lovely morning breathed of sweet earth into her open window and made it painful, in the dense twitter, chirp, cheep, and song of the air, to resist the innocent intoxication. O to love! was not said by her, but if she had sung, as her nature prompted, it would have been. Her war with Willoughby sprang of a desire to love repelled by distaste. Her cry for freedom was a cry to be free to love: she discovered it, half-shuddering: to love, oh! no—no shape of man, nor impalpable nature either: but to love unselfishness, and helpfulness, and planted strength in something. Then, loving and being loved a little, what strength would be hers! She could utter all the words needed to Willoughby and to her father, locked in her love: walking in this world, living in that.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXI
Clara's Meditations

Previously she had cried, despairing: If I were loved! Jealousy of Constantia's happiness, envy of her escape, ruled her then: and she remembered the cry, though not perfectly her plain-speaking to herself: she chose to think she had meant: If Willoughby were capable of truly loving! For now the fire of her brain had sunk, and refuges and subterfuges were round about it. The thought of personal love was encouraged, she chose to think, for the sake of the strength it lent her to carve her way to freedom. She had just before felt rather the reverse, but she could not exist with that feeling; and it was true that freedom was not so indistinct in her fancy as the idea of love.

Were men, when they were known, like him she knew too well?

The arch-tempter's question to her was there.

She put it away. Wherever she turned, it stood observing her. She knew so much of one man, nothing of the rest: naturally she was curious. Vernon might be sworn to be unlike. But he was exceptional. What of the other in the house?

Maidens are commonly reduced to read the masters of their destinies by their instincts; and when these have been edged by over-activity they must hoodwink their maidenliness to suffer themselves to read: and then they must dupe their minds, else men would soon see they were gifted to discern. Total ignorance being their pledge of purity to men, they have to expunge the writing of their perceptives on the tablets of the brain: they have to know not when they do know. The instinct of seeking to know, crossed by the task of blotting knowledge out, creates that conflict of the

Digitized by Google

natural with the artificial creature to which their ultimately-revealed double-face, complained of by ever-dissatisfied men, is owing. Wonder in no degree that they indulge a craving to be fools, or that many of them act the character. Jeer at them as little for not showing growth. You have reared them to this pitch, and at this pitch they have partly civilized you. Supposing you to want it done wholly, you must yield just as many points in your requisitions as are needed to let the wits of young women reap their due harvest and be of good use to their souls. You will then have a fair battle, a braver, with better results.

Clara's inner eye traversed Colonel de Craye at a shot.

She had immediately to blot out the vision of the Captain Oxford in him, the revelation of his laughing contempt for Willoughby, the view of mercurial principles, the scribbled histories of light love-passages.

She blotted it out, kept it from her mind: so she knew him, knew him to be a sweeter and a variable Willoughby, a generous kind of Willoughby, a Willoughby-butterfly, without having the free mind to summarize him and picture him for a warning. Scattered features of him, such as the instincts call up, were not sufficiently impressive. Besides the clouded mind was opposed to her receiving impressions.

Young Crossjay's voice in the still morning air came to her ears. The dear guileless chatter of the boy's voice! Why, assuredly it was young Crossjay who was the man she loved. And he loved her. And he was going to be an unselfish, sustaining, true strong man, the man she longed for, for anchorage.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXI
Clara's Meditations

Oh the dear voice! woodpecker and thrush in one. He never ceased to chatter to Vernon Whitford walking beside him with a swinging stride off to the lake for their morning swim. Happy couple! The morning gave them both a freshness and innocence above human. They seemed to Clara made of morning air and clear lake-water. Crossjay's voice ran up and down a diatonic scale, with here and there a query in semitone and a laugh on a ringing note. She wondered what he could have to talk of so incessantly, and imagined all the dialogue. He prattled of his yesterday, to-day and to-morrow; which did not imply past and future, but his vivid present. She felt like one vainly trying to fly in hearing him; she felt old. The consolation she arrived at was to feel maternal. She wished to hug the boy.

Trot and stride, Crossjay and Vernon entered the park, careless about wet grass, not once looking at the house. Crossjay ranged ahead and picked flowers, bounding back to show them. Clara's heart beat at a fancy that her name was mentioned. If those flowers were for her she would prize them!

The two bathers dipped over an undulation.

Her loss of them rattled her chains.

Deeply dwelling on their troubles has the effect upon the young of helping to forgetfulness; for they cannot think without imagining, their imaginations are saturated with their pleasures, and the collision, though they are unable to exchange sad for sweet, distils an opiate.

'Am I solemnly engaged?' she asked herself. She seemed to be awakening.

She glanced at her bed, where she had passed the

Digitized by Google

night of ineffectual moaning; and out on the high wave of grass, where Crossjay and his good friend had vanished.

Was the struggle all to be gone over again?

Little by little her intelligence of her actual position crept up to submerge her heart.

'I am in his house!' she said. It resembled a discovery, so strangely had her opiate and power of dreaming wrought through her tortures. She said it gasping. She was in his house, his guest, his betrothed, sworn to him. The fact stood out cut in steel on the pitiless daylight.

That consideration drove her to be an early wanderer in the wake of Crossjay.

Her station was among beeches on the flank of the boy's return; and while waiting there, the novelty of her waiting to waylay any one—she who had played the contrary part!—told her more than it pleased her to think. Yet she could admit that she did desire to speak with Vernon, as with a counsellor, harsh and curt, but wholesome.

The bathers reappeared on the grass-ridge, racing and flapping wet towels.

Some one hailed them. A sound of the galloping hoof drew her attention to the avenue. She saw Willoughby dash across the park-level, and dropping a word to Vernon, ride away. Then she allowed herself to be seen.

Crossjay shouted. Willoughby turned his head, but not his horse's head. The boy sprang up to Clara. He had swum across the lake and back; he had raced Mr. Whitford—and beaten him! How he wished Miss Middleton had been able to be one of them!

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXI
Clara's Meditations

Clara listened to him enviously. Her thought was: We women are nailed to our sex!

She said: 'And you have just been talking to Sir Willoughby.'

Crossjay drew himself up to give an imitation of the baronet's hand-waving in adieu.

He would not have done that, had he not smelt sympathy with the performance.

She declined to smile. Crossjay repeated it, and laughed. He made a broader exhibition of it to Vernon approaching: 'I say Mr. Whitford, who's this?'

Vernon doubled to catch him. Crossjay fled and resumed his magnificent air in the distance.

'Good morning, Miss Middleton; you are out early,' said Vernon, rather pale and stringy from his cold swim, and rather hard-eyed with the sharp exercise following it.

She had expected some of the kindness she wanted to reject, for he could speak very kindly, and she regarded him as her doctor of medicine, who would at least present the futile drug.

'Good morning,' she replied.

'Willoughby will not be home till the evening.'

'You could not have had a finer morning for your bath.'

'No.'

'I will walk as fast as you like.'

'I'm perfectly warm.'

'But you prefer fast walking.'

'Out.'

'Ah! yes, that I understand. The walk back! Why is Willoughby away to-day?'

Digitized by Google

'He has business.'

CHAPTER XXI Clara's Meditations

After several steps, she said: 'He makes very sure of papa.'

'Not without reason, you will find,' said Vernon.

'Can it be? I am bewildered. I had papa's promise.'

'To leave the Hall for a day or two.'

'It would have been . . .'

'Possibly. But other heads are at work as well as yours. If you had been in earnest about it, you would have taken your father into your confidence at once. That was the course I ventured to propose, on the supposition.'

'In earnest! I cannot imagine that you doubt it. I wished to spare him.'

'This is a case in which he can't be spared.'

'If I had been bound to any other! I did not know then *who* held me a prisoner. I thought I had only to speak to him sincerely.'

'Not many men would give up their prize for a word; Willoughby the last of any.'

'Prize' rang through her thrillingly from Vernon's mouth, and soothed her degradation.

She would have liked to protest that she was very little of a prize; a poor prize; not one at all in general estimation; only one to a man reckoning his property; no prize in the true sense.

The importunity of pain saved her.

'Does he think I can change again? Am I treated as something won in a lottery? To stay here is indeed indeed more than I can bear. And if he is calculating—Mr. Whitford, if he calculates on another change, his plotting to keep me here is inconsiderate, not very wise. Changes *may* occur in absence.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXI Clara's Meditations

'Wise or not, he has the right to scheme his best to keep you.'

She looked on Vernon with a shade of wondering reproach.

'Why? What right?'

'The right you admit when you ask him to release you. He has the right to think you deluded; and to think you may come to a better mood if you remain—a mood more agreeable to him, I mean. He has that right absolutely. You are bound to remember also that you stand in the wrong. You confess it when you appeal to his generosity. And every man has the right to retain a treasure in his hand if he can. Look straight at these facts.'

'You expect me to be all reason!'

'Try to be. It's the way to learn whether you are really in earnest.'

'I will try. It will drive me to worse!'

'Try honestly. What is wisest now is, in my opinion, for you to resolve to stay. I speak in the character of the person you sketched for yourself as requiring. Well, then, a friend repeats the same advice. You might have gone with your father: now you will only disturb him and annoy him. The chances are, he will refuse to go.'

'Are women ever so changeable as men, then? Papa consented; he agreed; he had some of my feeling; I saw it. That was yesterday. And at night! He spoke to each of us at night in a different tone from usual. With me he was hardly affectionate. But when you advise me to stay, Mr. Whitford, you do not perhaps reflect that it would be at the sacrifice of all candour.'

Digitized by Google

'Regard it as a probational term.'

'It has gone too far with me.'

'Take the matter into the head: try the case there.'

CHAPTER XXI Clara's Meditations

'Are you not counselling me as if I were a woman of intellect?'

The crystal ring in her voice told him that tears were near to flowing.

He shuddered slightly. 'You have intellect,' he said, nodded, and crossed the lawn, leaving her. He had to dress.

She was not permitted to feel lonely, for she was immediately joined by Colonel de Craye.

CHAPTER XXII

The Ride

Crossjay darted up to her a nose ahead of the colonel.

'I say, Miss Middleton, we're to have the whole day to ourselves, after morning lessons. Will you come and fish with me and see me bird's-nest?'

'Not for the satisfaction of beholding another cracked crown, my son'; the colonel interposed: and bowing to Clara: 'Miss Middleton is handed over to my exclusive charge for the day—with her consent?'

'I scarcely know,' said she, consulting a sensation of languor that seemed to contain some reminiscence. 'If I am here. My father's plans are uncertain. I will speak to him. If I am here, perhaps Crossjay would like a ride in the afternoon.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXII The Ride

'Oh! yes,' cried the boy; 'out over Bournden, through Mewsey up to Closham beacon, and down on Aspenwell, where there's a common for racing. And ford the stream!'

'An inducement for you,' De Craye said to her.

She smiled and squeezed the boy's hand.

'We won't go without you, Crossjay.'

'You don't carry a comb, my man, when you bathe?'

At this remark of the colonel's, young Crossjay conceived the appearance of his matted locks in the eyes of his adorable lady. He gave her one dear look through his redness, and fled.

'I like that boy,' said De Craye.

'I love him,' said Clara.

Crossjay's troubled eyelids in his honest young face became a picture for her.

'After all, Miss Middleton, Willoughby's notions about him are not so bad, if we consider that you will be in the place of a mother to him.'

'I think them bad.'

'You are disinclined to calculate the good fortune of the boy in having more of you on land than he would have in crown and anchor buttons!'

'You have talked of him with Willoughby.'

'We had a talk last night.'

Of how much? thought she.

'Willoughby returns?' she said.

'He dines here, I know; for he holds the key of the inner cellar, and Dr. Middleton does him the honour to applaud his wine. Willoughby was good enough to tell me that he thought I might contribute to amuse you.'

Digitized by Google

She was brooding in stupefaction on her father and the wine as she requested Colonel de Craye to persuade Willoughby to take the general view of Crossjay's future and act on it.

'He seems fond of the boy, too!' said De Craye musingly.

'You speak in doubt?'

'Not at all. But is he not—men are queer fish!—make allowance for us—a trifle tyrannical, pleasantly, with those he is fond of?'

'If they look right and left?'

It was meant for an interrogation: it was not with the sound of one that the words dropped. 'My dear Crossjay!' she sighed. 'I would willingly pay for him out of my own purse, and I will do so rather than have him miss his chance. I have not mustered resolution to propose it.'

'I may be mistaken, Miss Middleton. He talked of the boy's fondness of him.'

'He would.'

'I suppose he is hardly peculiar in liking to play Pole-star.'

'He may not be.'

'For the rest, your influence should be all powerful.'

'It is not.'

De Craye looked with a wandering eye at the heavens.

'We are having a spell of weather perfectly superb. And the odd thing is, that whenever we have splendid weather at home we're all for rushing abroad. I'm booked for a Mediterranean cruise—postponed to give place to your ceremony.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXII The Ride

'That?' she could not control her accent.

'What worthier?'

She was guilty of a pause.

De Craye saved it from an awkward length. 'I have written half an essay on Honeymoons, Miss Middleton.'

'Is that the same as a half-written essay, Colonel de Craye?'

'Just the same, with the difference that it's a whole essay written all on one side.'

'On which side?'

'The bachelor's.'

'Why does he trouble himself with such topics?'

'To warm himself for being left out in the cold.'

'Does he feel envy?'

'He has to confess it.'

'He has liberty.'

'A commodity he can't tell the value of if there's no one to buy.'

'Why should he wish to sell?'

'He's bent on completing his essay.'

'To make the reading dull.'

'There we touch the key of the subject. For what is to rescue the pair from a monotony multiplied by two? And so a bachelor's recommendation, when each has discovered the right sort of person to be dull with, pushes them from the Church door on a round of adventures containing a spice of peril, if 'tis to be had. Let them be in danger of their lives the first or second day. A bachelor's loneliness is a private affair of his own; he hasn't to look into a face to be ashamed of feeling it and inflicting it at the same time; 'tis his pillow; he can punch it an

Digitized by Google

he pleases, and turn it over t' other side, if he 's for a mighty variation; there 's a dream in it. But our poor couple are staring wide awake. All their dreaming 's done. They 've emptied their bottle of elixir, or broken it; and she has a thirst for the use of the tongue, and he to yawn with a crony; and they may converse, they 're not aware of it, more than the desert that has drunk a shower. So as soon as possible she 's away to the ladies, and he puts on his Club. That 's what your bachelor sees and would like to spare them; and if he didn't see something of the sort he 'd be off with a noose round his neck, on his knees in the dew to the morning milkmaid.'

'The bachelor is happily warned and on his guard,' said Clara, diverted, as he wished her to be. 'Sketch me a few of the adventures you propose.'

'I have a friend who rowed his bride from the Houses of Parliament up the Thames to the Severn on into North Wales. They shot some pretty weirs and rapids.'

'That was nice.'

'They had an infinity of adventures, and the best proof of the benefit they derived is, that they forgot everything about them except that the adventures occurred.'

'Those two must have returned bright enough to please you.'

'They returned, and shone like a wrecker's beacon to the mariner. You see, Miss Middleton, there was the landscape, and the exercise, and the occasional bit of danger. I think it 's to be recommended. The scene is always changeing, and not too fast; and 'tis not too sublime, like big mountains, to tire them of

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXII The Ride

their everlasting big Ohs. There's the difference between going into a howling wind, and launching among zephyrs. They have fresh air and movement, and not in a railway carriage; they can take in what they look on. And she has the steering ropes, and that's a wise commencement. And my lord is all day making an exhibition of his manly strength, bowing before her some dozen to the minute; and she, to help him, just inclines when she's in the mood. And they're face to face, in the nature of things, and are not under the obligation of looking the unutterable, because, you see, there's business in hand; and the boat's just the right sort of third party, who never interferes, but must be attended to. And they feel they're labouring together to get along, all in the proper proportion; and whether he has to labour in life or not, he proves his ability. What do you think of it, Miss Middleton?'

'I think you have only to propose it, Colonel de Craye.'

'And if they capsize, why, 'tis a natural ducking!'

'You forgot the lady's dressing-bag.'

'The stain on the metal for a constant reminder of his prowess in saving it! Well, and there's an alternative to that scheme and a finer:—This, then: they read dramatic pieces during courtship, to stop the saying of things over again till the drum of the ear becomes nothing but a drum to the poor head, and a little before they affix their signatures to the fatal Registry-book of the vestry, they enter into an engagement with a body of provincial actors to join the troop on the day of their nuptials, and away they go in their coach and four, and she is Lady Kitty Caper

Digitized by Google

for a month, and he Sir Harry Highflyer. See the honeymoon spinning! The marvel to me is, that none of the young couples do it. They could enjoy the world, see life, amuse the company, and come back fresh to their own characters, instead of giving themselves a dose of Africa without a savage to diversify it: an impression they never get over, I'm told. Many a character of the happiest auspices has irreparable mischief done it by the ordinary honeymoon. For my part, I rather lean to the second plan of campaign.'

Clara was expected to reply, and she said: 'Probably because you are fond of acting. It would require capacity on both sides.'

'Miss Middleton, *I* would undertake to breathe the enthusiasm for the stage and the adventure.'

'You are recommending it generally.'

'Let my gentleman only have a fund of enthusiasm. The lady will kindle. She always does at a spark.'

'If he has not any?'

'Then I'm afraid they must be mortally dull.'

She allowed her silence to speak; she knew that it did so too eloquently, and could not control the personal adumbration she gave to the one point of light revealed in, 'If he has not any.' Her figure seemed immediately to wear a cap and cloak of dulness.

She was full of revolt and anger, she was burning with her situation; if sensible of shame now at anything that she did, it turned to wrath and threw the burden on the author of her desperate distress. The hour for blaming herself had gone by, to be renewed ultimately perhaps in a season of freedom. She was

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXII The Ride

bereft of her insight within at present, so blind to herself, that while conscious of an accurate reading of Willoughby's friend, she thanked him in her heart for seeking simply to amuse her and slightly succeeding. The afternoon's ride with him and Crossjay was an agreeable beguilement to her in prospect.

Lætitia came to divide her from Colonel de Craye. Dr. Middleton was not seen before his appearance at the breakfast-table, where a certain air of anxiety in his daughter's presence produced the semblance of a raised map at intervals on his forehead. Few sights on earth are more deserving of our sympathy than a good man who has a troubled conscience thrust on him.

The Rev. Doctor's perturbation was observed. The ladies Eleanor and Isabel, seeing his daughter to be the cause of it, blamed her and would have assisted him to escape, but Miss Dale, whom he courted with that object, was of the opposite faction. She made way for Clara to lead her father out. He called to Vernon, who merely nodded while leaving the room by the window with Crossjay.

Half an eye on Dr. Middleton's pathetic exit in captivity sufficed to tell Colonel de Craye that parties divided the house. At first he thought how deplorable it would be to lose Miss Middleton for two days or three: and it struck him that Vernon Whitford and Lætitia Dale were acting oddly in seconding her, their aim not being discernible. For he was of the order of gentlemen of the obscurely-clear in mind, who have a predetermined acuteness in their watch upon the human play, and mark men and women as pieces of a bad game of chess, each pursuing an in-

Digitized by Google

terested course. His experience of a section of the world had educated him—as gallant, frank and manly a comrade as one could wish for—up to this point. But he soon abandoned speculations, which may be compared to a shaking of the anemometer, that will not let the troubled indicator take station. Reposing on his perceptions and his instincts, he fixed his attention on the chief persons, only glancing at the others to establish a postulate, that where there are parties in a house, the most bewitching person present is the origin of them. It is ever Helen's achievement. Miss Middleton appeared to him bewitching beyond mortal; sunny in her laughter, shadowy in her smiling; a young lady shaped for perfect music with a lover.

She was that, and no less, to every man's eye on earth. High breeding did not freeze her lovely girlishness.—But Willoughby did. This reflection intervened to blot luxurious picturings of her, and made itself acceptable by leading him back to several instances of an evident want of harmony of the pair.

And now (for purely undirected impulse all within us is not, though we may be eye-bandaged agents under direction) it became necessary for an honourable gentleman to cast vehement rebukes at the fellow who did not comprehend the jewel he had won. How could Willoughby behave like so complete a donkey! De Craye knew him to be in his interior stiff, strange, exacting: women had talked of him; he had been too much for one woman—the dashing Constantia: he had worn one woman, sacrificing far more for him than Constantia, to death. Still, with such a prize as Clara Middleton, Willoughby's behaviour was past

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXII The Ride

calculating in its contemptible absurdity. And during courtship! And courtship of that girl! It was the way of a man ten years after marriage.

The idea drew him to picture her doatingly in her young matronly bloom ten years after marriage: without a touch of age, matronly wise, womanly sweet: perhaps with a couple of little ones to love, never having known the love of a man.

To think of a girl like Clara Middleton never having, at nine and twenty, and with two fair children! known the love of a man, or the loving of a man, possibly, became torture to the Colonel.

For a pacification, he had to reconsider that she was as yet only nineteen and unmarried.

But she was engaged and she was unloved. One might swear to it, that she was unloved. And she was not a girl to be satisfied with a big house and a high-nosed husband.

There was a rapid alteration of the sad history of Clara the unloved matron solaced by two little ones. A childless Clara tragically loving and beloved, flashed across the dark glass of the future.

Either way her fate was cruel.

Some astonishment moved De Craye in the contemplation of the distance he had stepped in this morass of fancy. He distinguished the choice open to him of forward or back, and he selected forward. But fancy was dead: the poetry hovering about her grew invisible to him: he stood in the morass; that was all he knew; and momently he plunged deeper; and he was aware of an intense desire to see her face, that he might study her features again: he understood no more.

Digitized by Google

It was the clouding of the brain by the man's heart, which had come to the knowledge that it was caught.

A certain measure of astonishment moved him still. It had hitherto been his portion to do mischief to women and avoid the vengeance of the sex. What was there in Miss Middleton's face and air to ensnare a veteran handsome man of society numbering six and thirty years, nearly as many conquests? 'Each bullet has got its commission.' He was hit at last. That accident effected by Mr. Flitch had fired the shot. Clean through the heart, does not tell us of our misfortune till the heart is asked to renew its natural beating. It fell into the condition of the porcelain vase over a thought of Miss Middleton standing above his prostrate form on the road, and walking beside him to the Hall. Her words? What have they been? She had not uttered words, she had shed meanings. He did not for an instant conceive that he had charmed her: the charm she had cast on him was too thrilling for coxcombry to lift a head; still she had enjoyed his prattle. In return for her touch upon the Irish fountain in him, he had manifestly given her relief. And could not one see that so sprightly a girl would soon be deadened by a man like Willoughby? Deadened she was: she had not responded to a compliment on her approaching marriage. An allusion to it killed her smiling. The case of Mr. Flitch, with the half-wager about his reinstation in the service of the Hall was conclusive evidence of her opinion of Willoughby.

It became again necessary that he should abuse Willoughby for his folly. Why was the man worrying her? In some way he was worrying her.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXII
The Ride

What if Willoughby as well as Miss Middleton wished to be quit of the engagement? . . .

For just a second, the handsome woman-flattered officer proved his man's heart more whole than he supposed it. That great organ, instead of leaping at the thought, suffered a check.

Bear in mind, that his heart was not merely man's, it was a conqueror's. He was of the race of amorous heroes who glory in pursuing, overtaking, subduing: wresting the prize from a rival, having her ripe from exquisitely feminine inward conflicts, plucking her out of resistance in good old primitive fashion. You win the creature in her delicious flutterings. He liked her thus, in cooler blood, because of society's admiration of the capturer, and somewhat because of the strife, which always enhances the value of a prize, and refreshes our vanity in recollection.

Moreover, he had been matched against Willoughby: the circumstance had occurred two or three times. He could name a lady he had won, a lady he had lost. Willoughby's large fortune and grandeur of style had given him advantages at the start. But the start often means the race—with women, and a bit of luck.

The gentle check upon the galloping heart of Colonel de Craye endured no longer than a second —a simple side-glance in a headlong pace. Clara's enchantingness for a temperament like his, which is to say, for him specially, in part through the testimony her conquest of himself presented as to her power of sway over the universal heart known as man's, assured him she was worth winning even from a hand that dropped her.

Digitized by Google

He had now a double reason for exclaiming at the folly of Willoughby. Willoughby's treatment of her showed either temper or weariness. Vanity and judgement led De Craye to guess the former. Regarding her sentiments for Willoughby, he had come to his own conclusion. The certainty of it, caused him to assume that he possessed an absolute knowledge of her character: she was an angel, born supple; she was a heavenly soul, with half a dozen of the tricks of earth. Skittish filly, was among his phrases; but she had a bearing and a gaze that forbade the dip in the common gutter for wherewithal to paint the creature she was.

Now, then, to see whether he was wrong for the first time in his life! If not wrong, he had a chance.

There could be nothing dishonourable in rescuing a girl from an engagement she detested. An attempt to think it a service to Willoughby failed midway. De Craye dismissed that chicanery. It would be a service to Willoughby in the end, without question. There was that to soothe his manly honour. Meanwhile he had to face the thought of Willoughby as an antagonist, and the world looking heavy on his honour as a friend.

Such considerations drew him tenderly close to Miss Middleton. It must, however, be confessed that the mental ardour of Colonel de Craye had been a little sobered by his glance at the possibility of both of the couple being of one mind on the subject of their betrothal. Desireable as it was that they should be united in disagreeing, it reduced the romance to platitude, and the third person in the drama to the appearance of a stick. No man likes to play that part.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXII
The Ride

Memoirs of the favourites of Goddesses, if we had them, would confirm it of men's tastes in this respect, though the divinest be the prize. We behold what part they played.

De Craye chanced to be crossing the hall from the laboratory to the stables when Clara shut the library-door behind her. He said something whimsical, and did not stop, nor did he look twice at the face he had been longing for.

What he had seen made him fear there would be no ride out with her that day. Their next meeting reassured him; she was dressed in her riding-habit and wore a countenance resolutely cheerful. He gave himself the word of command to take his tone from her.

He was of a nature as quick as Clara's. Experience pushed him farther than she could go in fancy; but experience laid a sobering finger on his practical steps, and bade them hang upon her initiative. She talked little. Young Crossjay cantering ahead was her favourite subject. She was very much changed since the early morning; his liveliness, essayed by him at a hazard, was unsuccessful; grave English pleased her best. The descent from that was naturally to melancholy. She mentioned a regret she had that the Veil was interdicted to women in Protestant countries. De Craye was fortunately silent; he could think of no other veil than the Moslem, and when her meaning struck his witless head, he admitted to himself that devout attendance on a young lady's mind stupefies man's intelligence. Half an hour later, he was as foolish in supposing it a confidence. He was again saved by silence.

Digitized by Google

In Aspenwell village she drew a letter from her bosom and called to Crossjay to post it. The boy sang out: 'Miss Lucy Darleton! What a nice name!'

Clara did not show that the name betrayed anything.

She said to De Craye: 'It proves he should not be here thinking of nice names.'

Her companion replied: 'You may be right.' He added, to avoid feeling too subservient: 'Boys will.'

'Not if they have stern masters to teach them their daily lessons, and some of the lessons of existence.'

'Vernon Whitford is not stern enough?'

'Mr. Whitford has to contend with other influences here.'

'With Willoughby?'

'Not with Willoughby.'

He understood her. She touched the delicate indication firmly. The man's heart respected her for it; not many girls could be so thoughtful or dare to be so direct; he saw that she had become deeply serious, and he felt her love of the boy to be maternal, past maiden sentiment.

By this light of her seriousness, the posting of her letter in a distant village, not entrusting it to the Hall post-box, might have import; not that she would apprehend the violation of her private correspondence, but we like to see our letter of weighty meaning pass into the mouth of the public box.

Consequently this letter was important. It was to suppose a sequency in the conduct of a variable damsel. Coupled with her remark about the Veil, and with other things, not words, breathing from her (which were the breath of her condition), it was not

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXII The Ride

unreasonably to be supposed. She might even be a very consistent person. If one only had the key of her!

She spoke once of an immediate visit to London, supposing that she could induce her father to go. De Craye remembered the occurrence in the hall at night, and her aspect of distress.

They raced along Aspenwell Common to the ford; shallow, to the chagrin of young Crossjay, between whom and themselves they left a fitting space for his rapture in leading his pony to splash up and down, lord of the stream.

Swiftness of motion so strikes the blood on the brain that our thoughts are lightnings, the heart is master of them.

De Craye was heated by his gallop to venture on the angling question: 'Am I to hear the names of the bridesmaids?'

The pace had nerved Clara to speak to it sharply: 'There is no need.'

'Have I no claim?'

She was mute.

'Miss Lucy Darleton, for instance; whose name I am almost as much in love with as Crossjay.'

'She will not be bridesmaid to me.'

'She declines? Add my petition, I beg.'

'To all? or to her?'

'Do all the bridesmaids decline?'

'The scene is too ghastly.'

'A marriage?'

'Girls have grown sick of it.'

'Of weddings? We 'll overcome the sickness.'

'With some.'

Digitized by Google

'Not with Miss Darleton? You tempt my eloquence.'

'You wish it?'

'To win her consent? Certainly.'

'The scene!'

'Do I wish that?'

'Marriage!' exclaimed Clara, dashing into the ford, fearful of her ungovernable wildness and of what it might have kindled.—You, father! you have driven me to unmaidenliness!—She forgot Willoughby in her father, who would not quit a comfortable house for her all but prostrate beseeching; would not bend his mind to her explanations, answered her with the horrid iteration of such deaf misunderstanding as may be associated with a tolling bell.

De Craye allowed her to catch Crossjay by herself. They entered a narrow lane, mysterious with possible birds' eggs in the May-green hedges. As there was not room for three abreast, the colonel made up the rearguard, and was consoled by having Miss Middleton's figure to contemplate; but the readiness of her joining in Crossjay's pastime of the nest-hunt was not so pleasing to a man that she had wound to a pitch of excitement. Her scornful accent on 'Marriage' rang through him. Apparently she was beginning to do with him just as she liked, herself entirely unconcerned.

She kept Crossjay beside her till she dismounted, and the colonel was left to the procession of elephantine ideas in his head, whose ponderousness he took for natural weight. We do not with impunity abandon the initiative. Men who have yielded it are like cavalry put on the defensive; a very small force with an ictus will scatter them.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXII The Ride

Anxiety to recover lost ground reduced the dimensions of his ideas to a practical standard.

Two ideas were opposed like duellists bent on the slaughter of one another. Either she amazed him by confirming the suspicions he had gathered of her sentiments for Willoughby in the moments of his introduction to her; or she amazed him as a model for coquettes:—the married and the widowed might apply to her for lessons.

These combatants exchanged shots, but remained standing: the encounter was undecided. Whatever the result, no person so seductive as Clara Middleton had he ever met. Her cry of loathing: 'Marriage!' coming from a girl, rang faintly clear of an ancient virginal aspiration of the sex to escape from their coil, and bespoke a pure cold savage pride that transplanted his thirst for her to higher fields.

CHAPTER XXIII

Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

Sir Willoughby meanwhile was on a line of conduct suiting his appreciation of his duty to himself. He had deluded himself with the simple notion that good fruit would come of the union of temper and policy.

No delusion is older, none apparently so promising, both parties being eager for the alliance. Yet, the theorists upon human nature will say, they are obviously of adverse disposition. And this is true,

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

inasmuch as neither of them will submit to the yoke of an established union; as soon as they have done their mischief, they set to work tugging for a divorce. But they have attractions, the one for the other, which precipitate them to embrace whenever they meet in a breast; each is earnest with the owner of it to get him to officiate forthwith as wedding-priest. And here is the reason: temper, to warrant its appearance, desires to be thought as deliberative as policy; and policy, the sooner to prove its shrewdness, is impatient for the quick blood of temper.

It will be well for men to resolve at the first approaches of the amorous but fickle pair upon interdicting even an accidental temporary junction: for the astonishing sweetness of the couple when no more than the ghosts of them have come together in a projecting mind is an intoxication beyond fermented grapejuice or a witch's brewage; and under the guise of active wits they will lead us to the parental meditation of antics compared with which a Pagan Saturnalia were less impious in the sight of sanity. This is full-mouthed-language; but on our studious way through any human career we are subject to fits of moral elevation; the theme inspires it, and the sage residing in every civilized bosom approves it.

Decide at the outset, that temper is fatal to policy: hold them with both hands in division. One might add, be doubtful of your policy and repress your temper: it would be to suppose you wise. You can however, by incorporating two or three captains of the great army of truisms bequeathed to us by ancient wisdom, fix in your service those veteran old stand-

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

fasts to check you. They will not be serviceless in their admonitions to your understanding, and they will so contrive to reconcile with it the natural capers of the wayward young sprig Conduct, that the latter, who commonly learns to walk upright and straight from nothing softer than raps of a bludgeon on his crown, shall foot soberly, appearing at least wary of dangerous corners.

Now Willoughby had not to be taught that temper is fatal to policy; he was beginning to see in addition that the temper he encouraged was particularly obnoxious to the policy he adopted; and although his purpose in mounting horse after yesterday frowning on his bride was definite, and might be deemed sagacious, he bemoaned already the fatality pushing him ever farther from her in chase of a satisfaction impossible to grasp.

But the bare fact that her behaviour demanded a line of policy crossed the grain of his temper: it was very offensive.

Considering that she wounded him severely, her reversal of their proper parts, by taking the part belonging to him, and requiring his watchfulness, and the careful dealings he was accustomed to expect from others and had a right to exact of her, was injuriously unjust. The feelings of a man hereditarily sensitive to property accused her of a trespassing impudence, and knowing himself, by testimony of his household, his tenants and the neighbourhood, and the world as well, amiable when he received his dues, he contemplated her with an air of stiff-backed ill-treatment, not devoid of a certain sanctification of martyrdom.

Digitized by Google

His bitterest enemy would hardly declare that it was he who was in the wrong.

CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

Clara herself had never been audacious enough to say that. Distaste of his person was inconceivable to the favourite of society. The capricious creature probably wanted a whipping to bring her to the understanding of the principle called mastery, which is in man.

But was he administering it? If he retained a hold on her, he could undoubtedly apply the scourge at leisure; any kind of scourge; he could shun her, look on her frigidly, unbend to her to find a warmer place for sarcasm, pityingly smile, ridicule, pay court elsewhere. He could do these things if he retained a hold on her; and he could do them well because of the faith he had in his renowned amiability; for in doing them, he could feel that he was other than he seemed, and his own cordial nature was there to comfort him while he bestowed punishment. Cordial indeed, the chills he endured were flung from the world. His heart was in that fiction: half the hearts now beating have a mild form of it to keep them merry: and the chastisement he desired to inflict was really no more than righteous vengeance for an offended goodness of heart. Clara figuratively, absolutely perhaps, on her knees, he would raise her and forgive her. He yearned for the situation. To let her understand how little she had known him! It would be worth the pain she had dealt, to pour forth the stream of re-established confidences, to paint himself to her as he was; as he was in the spirit, not as he was to the world: though the world had reason to do him honour.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

First, however, she would have to be humbled.

Something whispered that his hold on her was lost.

In such a case, every blow he struck would set her flying farther, till the breach between them would be past bridging.

Determination not to let her go, was the best finish to this perpetually revolving round which went like the same old wheel-planks of a water-mill in his head at a review of the injury he sustained. He had come to it before, and he came to it again. There was his vengeance. It melted him, she was so sweet! She shone for him like the sunny breeze on water. Thinking of her caused a catch of his breath.

The dreadful young woman had a keener edge for the senses of men than sovereign beauty.

It would be madness to let her go.

She affected him like an outlook on the great Patterne estate after an absence, when his welcoming flag wept for pride above Patterne Hall.

It would be treason to let her go.

It would be cruelty to her.

He was bound to reflect that she was of tender age, and the foolishness of the wretch was excuseable to extreme youth.

We toss away a flower that we are tired of smelling and do not wish to carry. But the rose — young woman—is not cast off with impunity. A fiend in shape of man is always behind us to appropriate her. He that touches that rejected thing is larcenous. Willoughby had been sensible of it in the person of Lætitia: and by all the more that Clara's charms exceeded the faded creature's, he felt it now. Ten thousand Furies thickened about him at a thought of

Digitized by Google

her lying by the roadside without his having crushed all bloom and odour out of her which might tempt even the curiosity of the fiend, man.

CHAPTER XXIII Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

On the other hand, supposing her to lie there untouched, universally declined by the sniffing sagacious dog-fiend, a miserable spinster for years, he could conceive notions of his remorse. A soft remorse may be adopted as an agreeable sensation within view of the wasted penitent whom we have struck a trifle too hard. Seeing her penitent, he certainly would be willing to surround her with little offices of compromising kindness. It would depend on her age. Supposing her still youngish, there might be captivating passages between them; as thus, in a style not unfamiliar:

'And was it my fault, my poor girl? Am I to blame, that you have passed a lonely unloved youth?'

'No, Willoughby; the irreparable error was mine, the blame is mine, mine only. I live to repent it. I do not seek, for I have not deserved, your pardon. Had I it, I should need my own self-esteem to presume to clasp it to a bosom ever unworthy of you.'

'I may have been impatient, Clara: we are human!'

'Never be it mine to accuse one on whom I laid so heavy a weight of forbearance!'

'Still, my old love!—for I am merely quoting history in naming you so—I cannot have been perfectly blameless.'

'To me you were, and are.'

'Clara!'

'Willoughby!'

'Must I recognize the bitter truth that we two, once nearly one! so nearly one! are eternally separated?'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

'I have envisaged it. My friend—I may call you friend: you have ever been my friend, my best friend! Oh, that eyes had been mine to know the friend I had!—Willoughby, in the darkness of night, and during days that were as night to my soul, I have seen the inexorable finger pointing my solitary way through the wilderness from a Paradise forfeited by my most wilful, my wanton, sin. We have met. It is more than I have merited. We part. In mercy let it be for ever. Oh, terrible word! Coined by the passions of our youth, it comes to us for our sole riches when we are bankrupt of earthly treasures, and is the passport given by Abnegation unto Woe that prays to quit this probationary sphere. Willoughby, we part. It is better so.'

'Clara! one—one only—one last—one holy kiss!'

'If these poor lips, that once were sweet to you . . .'

The kiss, to continue the language of the imaginative composition of his time, favourite readings in which had inspired Sir Willoughby with a colloquy so pathetic, was imprinted.

Ay, she had the kiss, and no mean one. It was intended to swallow every vestige of dwindling attractiveness out of her, and there was a bit of scandal springing of it in the background that satisfactorily settled her business, and left her 'enshrined in memory, a divine recollection, to him,' as his popular romances would say, and have said for years.

Unhappily, the fancied salute of her lips encircled him with the breathing Clara. She rushed up from vacancy like a wind summoned to wreck a stately vessel.

His reverie had thrown him into severe commotion.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

The slave of a passion thinks in a ring, as hares run: he will cease where he began. Her sweetness had set him off, and he whirled back to her sweetness: and that being incalculable and he insatiable, you have the picture of his torments when you consider that her behaviour made her as a cloud to him.

Riding slack, horse and man, in the likeness of those two ajog homeward from the miry hunt, the horse pricked his ears, and Willoughby looked down from his road along the hills on the race headed by young Crossjay with a short start over Aspenwell Common to the ford. There was no mistaking who they were, though they were well-nigh a mile distant below. He noticed that they did not overtake the boy. They drew rein at the ford, talking not simply face to face, but face in face. Willoughby's novel feeling of he knew not what drew them up to him, enabling him to fancy them bathing in one another's eyes. Then she sprang through the ford, De Craye following, but not close after—and why not close? She had flicked him with one of her peremptorily saucy speeches when she was bold with the gallop. They were not unknown to Willoughby. They signified intimacy.

Last night he had proposed to De Craye to take Miss Middleton for a ride the next afternoon. It never came to his mind then that he and his friend had formerly been rivals. He wished Clara to be amused. Policy dictated that every thread should be used to attach her to her residence at the Hall until he could command his temper to talk to her calmly and overwhelm her, as any man in earnest, with command of temper and a point of vantage, may be sure to whelm a young woman. Policy, adulterated by

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

temper, yet policy it was that had sent him on his errand in the early morning to beat about for a house and garden suitable to Dr. Middleton within a circuit of five, six, or seven miles of Patterne Hall. If the Rev. Doctor liked the house and took it (and Willoughby had seen the place to suit him), the neighbourhood would be a chain upon Clara: and if the house did not please a gentleman rather hard to please (except in a venerable wine), an excuse would have been started for his visiting other houses, and he had the response to his importunate daughter, that he believed an excellent house was on view. Dr. Middleton had been prepared by numerous hints to meet Clara's black misreading of a lover's quarrel, so that everything looked full of promise as far as Willoughby's exercise of policy went.

But the strange pang traversing him now convicted him of a large adulteration of profitless temper with it. The loyalty of De Craye to a friend, where a woman walked in the drama, was notorious. It was there, and a most flexible thing it was: and it soon resembled reason manipulated by the sophists. Not to have reckoned on his peculiar loyalty was proof of the blindness cast on us by temper.

And De Craye had an Irish tongue; and he had it under control, so that he could talk good sense and airy nonsense at discretion. The strongest overboiling of English Puritan contempt of a gabbler would not stop women from liking it. Evidently Clara did like it, and Willoughby thundered on her sex. Unto such brainless things as these do we, under the irony of circumstances, confide our honour!

For he was no gabbler. He remembered having

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

rattled in earlier days; he had rattled with an object to gain, desiring to be taken for an easy, careless, vivacious, charming fellow, as any young gentleman may be who gaily wears the golden dish of Fifty thousand pounds per annum nailed to the back of his very saintly young pate. The growth of the critical spirit in him, however, had informed him that slang had been a principal component of his rattling; and as he justly supposed it a betraying art for his race and for him, he passed through the prim and the yawning phases of affected indifference, to the pure Puritanism of a leaden contempt of gabblers.

They snare women, you see—girls! How despicable the host of girls!—at least, that girl below there!

Married women understood him: widows did. He placed an exceedingly handsome and flattering young widow of his acquaintance, Lady Mary Lewison, beside Clara for a comparison, involuntarily; and at once, in a flash, in despite of him (he would rather it had been otherwise), and in despite of Lady Mary's high birth and connections as well, the silver lustre of the maid sicklied the poor widow.

The effect of the luckless comparison was to produce an image of surpassingness in the features of Clara that gave him the final, or mace-blow. Jealousy invaded him.

He had hitherto been free of it, regarding jealousy as a foreign devil, the accursed familiar of the vulgar. Luckless fellows might be victims of the disease; he was not; and neither Captain Oxford, nor Vernon, nor De Craye, nor any of his compeers, had given him one shrewd pinch: the woman had, not the man; and she in

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

quite a different fashion from his present wallowing anguish: she had never pulled him to earth's level, where jealousy gnaws the grasses. He had boasted himself above the humiliating visitation.

If that had been the case, we should not have needed to trouble ourselves much about him. A run or two with the pack of imps would have satisfied us. But he desired Clara Middleton manfully enough at an intimation of rivalry to be jealous; in a minute the foreign devil had him, he was flame: flaming verdigris, one might almost dare to say, for an exact illustration; such was actually the colour; but accept it as unsaid.

Remember the poets upon Jealousy. It is to be haunted in the heaven of two by a Third; preceded or succeeded, therefore surrounded, embraced, hugged by this infernal Third: it is Love's bed of burning marl; to see and taste the withering Third in the bosom of sweetness; to be dragged through the past and find the fair Eden of it sulphurous; to be dragged to the gates of the future and glory to behold them blood: to adore the bitter creature trebly and with treble power to clutch her by the windpipe: it is to be cheated, derided, shamed, and abject and supplicating, and consciously demoniacal in treacherousness, and victoriously self-justified in revenge.

And still there is no change in what men feel, though in what they do the modern may be judicious.

You know the many paintings of man transformed to rageing beast by the curse: and this, the fieriest trial of our egoism, worked in the Egoist to produce division of himself from himself, a concentration of his thoughts upon another object, still himself, but

Digitized by Google

in another breast, which had to be looked at and into for the discovery of him. By the gaping jaw-chasm of his greed we may gather comprehension of his insatiate force of jealousy. Let her go? Not though he were to become a mark of public scorn in strangling her with the yoke! His concentration was marvellous. Unused to the exercise of imaginative powers, he nevertheless conjured her before him visually till his eyeballs ached. He saw none but Clara, hated none, loved none, save the intolerable woman. What logic was in him deduced her to be individual and most distinctive from the circumstance that only she had ever wrought these pangs. She had made him ready for them, as we know. An idea of De Craye being no stranger to her when he arrived at the Hall, dashed him at De Craye for a second: it might be or might not be that they had a secret;—Clara was the spell. So prodigiously did he love and hate, that he had no permanent sense except for her. The soul of him writhed under her eyes at one moment, and the next it closed on her without mercy. She was his possession escaping; his own gliding away to the Third.

There would be pangs for him too, that Third! Standing at the altar to see her fast-bound, soul and body, to another, would be good roasting fire.

It would be good roasting fire for her too, should she be averse. To conceive her aversion was to burn her and devour her. She would then be his!—what say you? Burnt and devoured! Rivals would vanish then. Her reluctance to espouse the man she was plighted to, would cease to be uttered, cease to be felt.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

At last he believed in her reluctance. All that had been wanted to bring him to the belief was the scene on the common; such a mere spark, or an imagined spark! But the presence of the Third was necessary; otherwise he would have had to suppose himself personally distasteful.

Women have us back to the conditions of primitive man, or they shoot us higher than the topmost star. But it is as we please. Let them tell us what we are to them: for us, they are our back and front of life: the poet's Lesbia, the poet's Beatrice; ours is the choice. And were it proved that some of the bright things are in the pay of Darkness, with the stamp of his coin on their palms, and that some are the very angels we hear sung of, not the less might we say that they find us out, they have us by our leanings. They are to us what we hold of best or worst within. By their state is our civilization judged: and if it is hugely animal still, that is because primitive men abound and will have their pasture. Since the lead is ours, the leaders must bow their heads to the sentence. Jealousy of a woman, is the primitive egoism seeking to refine in a blood gone to savagery under apprehension of an invasion of rights; it is in action the tiger threatened by a rifle when his paw is rigid on quick flesh; he tears the flesh for rage at the intruder. The Egoist, who is our original male in giant form, had no bleeding victim beneath his paw, but there was the sex to mangle. Much as he prefers the well-behaved among women, who can worship and fawn, and in whom terror can be inspired, in his wrath he would make of Beatrice a Lesbia Quadrantaria.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

Let women tell us of their side of the battle. We are not so much the test of the Egoist in them as they to us. Movements of similarity shown in crowned and undiademed ladies of intrepid independence, suggest their occasional capacity to be like men when it is given to them to hunt. At present they fly, and there is the difference. Our manner of the chase informs them of the creature we are.

Dimly as young women are informed, they have a youthful ardour of detestation that renders them less tolerant of the Egoist than their perceptive elder sisters. What they do perceive, however, they have a redoubtable grasp of, and Clara's behaviour would be indefensible if her detective feminine vision might not sanction her acting on its direction. Seeing him as she did, she turned from him and shunned his house as the antre of an ogre. She had posted her letter to Lucy Darleton. Otherwise, if it had been open to her to dismiss Colonel de Craye, she might, with a warm kiss to Vernon's pupil, have seriously thought of the next shrill steam-whistle across yonder hills for a travelling companion on the way to her friend Lucy; so abhorrent was to her the putting of her horse's head toward the Hall. Oh, the breaking of bread there! It had to be gone through for another day and more: that is to say, forty hours, it might be six and forty hours! and no prospect of sleep to speed any of them on wings!

Such were Clara's inward interjections while poor Willoughby burnt himself out with verdigris flame having the savour of bad metal, till the hollow of his breast was not unlike a corroded old cuirass found, we will assume, by criminal lantern-beams in a digging

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

beside green-mantled pools of the sullen soil, lumped with a strange adhesive concrete. How else picture the sad man?—the cavity felt empty to him, and heavy; sick of an ancient and mortal combat, and burning; deeply-dinted too:

> With the starry hole
> Whence fled the soul:

very sore; impotent for aught save sluggish agony; a specimen and the issue of strife.

Measurelessly to loathe was not sufficient to save him from pain: he tried it: nor to despise; he went to a depth there also. The fact that she was a healthy young woman, returned to the surface of his thoughts like the murdered body pitched into the river, which will not drown and calls upon the elements of dissolution to float it. His grand hereditary desire to transmit his estates, wealth and name to a solid posterity, while it prompted him in his loathing and contempt of a nature mean and ephemeral compared with his, attached him desperately to her splendid healthiness. The council of elders, whose descendant he was, pointed to this young woman for his mate. He had wooed her with the idea that they consented. O she was healthy! And he likewise; but, as if it had been a duel between two clearly designated by quality of blood to bid a House endure, she was the first who taught him what it was to have sensations of his mortality.

He could not forgive her. It seemed to him consequently politic to continue frigid and let her have a further taste of his shadow, when it was his burning wish to strain her in his arms to a flatness provoking his compassion.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII
Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

'You have had your ride?' he addressed her politely in the general assembly on the lawn.

'I have had my ride, yes,' Clara replied.

'Agreeable, I trust?'

'Very agreeable.'

So it appeared. Oh, blushless!

The next instant he was in conversation with Lætitia, questioning her upon a dejected droop of her eyelashes.

'I am, I think,' said she, 'constitutionally melancholy.'

He murmured to her: 'I believe in the existence of specifics, and not far to seek, for all our ailments except those we bear at the hands of others.'

She did not dissent.

De Craye, whose humour for being convinced that Willoughby cared about as little for Miss Middleton as she for him was nourished by his immediate observation of them, dilated on the beauty of the ride and his fair companion's equestrian skill.

'You should start a travelling circus,' Willoughby rejoined.

'But the idea's a worthy one!—There's another alternative to the expedition I proposed, Miss Middleton,' said De Craye. 'And I be clown? I haven't a scruple of objection. I must read up books of jokes.'

'Don't,' said Willoughby.

'I'd spoil my part! But a natural clown won't keep up an artificial performance for an entire month, you see; which is the length of time we propose. He'll exhaust his nature in a day and be bowled over by the dullest regular donkey-engine with paint on his cheeks and a nodding-topknot.'

'What is this expedition "we" propose?'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII Treats of the Union of Temper and Policy

De Craye was advised in his heart to spare Miss Middleton any allusion to honeymoons.

'Merely a game to cure dulness.'

'Ah,' Willoughby acquiesced. 'A month, you said?'

'One'd like it to last for years!'

'Ah! You are driving one of Mr. Merriman's witticisms at me, Horace; I am dense.'

Willoughby bowed to Dr. Middleton and drew him from Vernon, filially taking his arm to talk with him closely.

De Craye saw Clara's look as her father and Willoughby went aside thus linked.

It lifted him over anxieties and casuistries concerning loyalty. Powder was in the look to make a warhorse breathe high and shiver for the signal.

CHAPTER XXIV

Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

Observers of a gathering complication and a character in action commonly resemble gleaners who are intent only on picking up the ears of grain and huddling their store. Disinterestedly or interestedly they wax over-eager for the little trifles, and make too much of them. Observers should begin upon the precept, that not all we see is worth hoarding, and that the things we see are to be weighed in the scale with what we know of the situation, before we commit ourselves to a measurement. And they may be accurate observers without being good judges. They do not think so,

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

and their bent is to glean hurriedly and form conclusions as hasty, when their business should be sift at each step, and question.

Miss Dale seconded Vernon Whitford in the occupation of counting looks and tones, and noting scraps of dialogue. She was quite disinterested; he quite believed that he was; to this degree they were competent for their post; and neither of them imagined they could be personally involved in the dubious result of the scenes they witnessed. They were but anxious observers, diligently collecting. She fancied Clara susceptible to his advice: he had fancied it, and was considering it one of his vanities. Each mentally compared Clara's abruptness in taking them into her confidence with her abstention from any secret word since the arrival of Colonel de Craye. Sir Willoughby requested Lætitia to give Miss Middleton as much of her company as she could; showing that he was on the alert. Another Constantia Durham seemed beating her wings for flight. The suddenness of the evident intimacy between Clara and Colonel de Craye shocked Lætitia: their acquaintance could be computed by hours. Yet at their first interview she had suspected the possibility of worse than she now supposed to be; and she had begged Vernon not immediately to quit the Hall, in consequence of that faint suspicion. She had been led to it by meeting Clara and De Craye at her cottage-gate, and finding them as fluent and laughter-breathing in conversation as friends. Unable to realize the rapid advance to a familiarity, more ostensible than actual, of two lively natures, after such an introduction as they had undergone: and one of the two pining in a drought of liveliness: Lætitia

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

listened to their wager of nothing at all—a *no* against a *yes*—in the case of poor Flitch; and Clara's, 'Willoughby will not forgive': and De Craye's: 'Oh! he's human': and the silence of Clara: and De Craye's hearty cry: 'Flitch shall be a gentleman's coachman in his old seat again, or I haven't a tongue!' to which there was a negative of Clara's head:—and it then struck Lætitia that this young betrothed lady, whose alienated heart acknowledged no lord an hour earlier, had met her match, and, as the observer would have said, her destiny. She judged of the alarming possibility by the recent revelation to herself of Miss Middleton's character, and by Clara's having spoken to a man as well (to Vernon), and previously. That a young lady should speak on the subject of the inner holies to a man, though he were Vernon Whitford, was incredible to Lætitia; but it had to be accepted as one of the dread facts of our inexplicable life, which drag our bodies at their wheels and leave our minds exclaiming. Then, if Clara could speak to Vernon, which Lætitia would not have done for a mighty bribe, she could speak to De Craye, Lætitia thought deductively: this being the logic of untrained heads opposed to the proceeding whereby their condemnatory deduction hangs.—Clara must have spoken to De Craye!

Lætitia remembered how winning and prevailing Miss Middleton could be in her confidences. A gentleman hearing her might forget his duty to his friend, she thought, for she had been strangely swayed by Clara: ideas of Sir Willoughby that she had never before imagined herself to entertain, had been sown in her, she thought; not asking herself whether the

Digitized by Google

searchingness of the young lady had struck them and bidden them rise from where they lay embedded. Very gentle women take in that manner impressions of persons, especially of the worshipped person, wounding them; like the new fortifications with embankments of soft earth, where explosive missiles bury themselves harmlessly until they are plucked out; and it may be a reason why those injured ladies outlive a Clara Middleton similarly battered.

CHAPTER XXIV
Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

Vernon less than Lætitia took into account that Clara was in a state of fever, scarcely reasonable. Her confidences to him he had excused, as a piece of conduct, in sympathy with her position. He had not been greatly astonished by the circumstances confided; and, on the whole, as she was excited and unhappy, he excused her thoroughly; he could have extolled her: it was natural that she should come to him, brave in her to speak so frankly, a compliment that she should condescend to treat him as a friend. Her position excused her widely. But she was not excused for making a confidential friend of De Craye. There was a difference.

Well, the difference was, that De Craye had not the smarting sense of honour with women which our meditator had: an impartial judiciary, it will be seen: and he discriminated between himself and the other justly: but sensation surging to his brain at the same instant, he reproached Miss Middleton for not perceiving that difference as clearly, before she betrayed her position to De Craye, which Vernon assumed that she had done. Of course he did. She had been guilty of it once: why, then, in the mind of an offended friend, she would be guilty of it twice.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

There was evidence. Ladies, fatally predestined to appeal to that from which they have to be guarded, must expect severity when they run off their railed highroad: justice is out of the question: man's brains might, his blood cannot administer it to them. By chilling him to the bone, they may get what they cry for. But that is a method deadening to their point of appeal.

In the evening Miss Middleton and the colonel sang a duet. She had of late declined to sing. Her voice was noticeably firm. Sir Willoughby said to her, 'You have recovered your richness of tone, Clara.' She smiled and appeared happy in pleasing him. He named a French ballad. She went to the music-rack and gave the song unasked. He should have been satisfied, for she said to him at the finish: 'Is that as you like it?' He broke from a murmur to Miss Dale: 'Admirable.' Some one mentioned a Tuscan popular canzone. She waited for Willoughby's approval, and took his nod for a mandate.

Traitress! he could have bellowed.

He had read of this characteristic of caressing obedience of the women about to deceive. He had in his time profited by it.

'Is it intuitively or by their experience that our neighbours across Channel surpass us in the knowledge of your sex?' he said to Miss Dale and talked through Clara's apostrophe to the 'Santissima Virgine Maria,' still treating temper as a part of policy, without any effect on Clara; and that was matter for sickly green reflections. The lover who cannot wound has indeed lost anchorage; he is woefully adrift: he

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV
Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

stabs air, which is to stab himself. Her complacent proof-armour bids him know himself supplanted.

During the short conversational period before the ladies retired for the night, Miss Eleanor alluded to the wedding by chance. Miss Isabel replied to her, and addressed an interrogation to Clara. De Craye foiled it adroitly. Clara did not utter a syllable. Her bosom lifted to a wavering height and sank. Subsequently she looked at De Craye, vacantly, like a person awakened, but she looked. She was astonished by his readiness, and thankful for the succour. Her look was cold, wide, unfixed, with nothing of gratitude or of personal in it. The look however stood too long for Willoughby's endurance. Ejaculating: 'Porcelain!' he uncrossed his legs: a signal for the ladies Eleanor and Isabel to retire. Vernon bowed to Clara as she was rising. He had not been once in her eyes, and he expected a partial recognition at the good-night. She said it, turning her head to Miss Isabel, who was condoling once more with Colonel de Craye over the ruins of his wedding-present, the porcelain vase, which she supposed to have been in Willoughby's mind when he displayed the signal. Vernon walked off to his room, dark as one smitten blind: bile tumet jecur: her stroke of neglect hit him there where a blow sends thick obscuration upon eyeballs and brain alike.

Clara saw that she was paining him and regretted it when they were separated. That was her real friend! But he prescribed too hard a task. Besides she had done everything he demanded of her, except the consenting to stay where she was and wear out Willoughby, whose dexterity wearied her small stock

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

of patience. She had vainly tried remonstrance and supplication with her father hoodwinked by his host, she refused to consider how: through wine?—the thought was repulsive.

Nevertheless she was drawn to the edge of it by the contemplation of her scheme of release. If Lucy Darleton was at home: if Lucy invited her to come: if she flew to Lucy: Oh! then her father would have cause for anger. He would not remember that but for hateful wine! . . .

What was there in this wine of great age which expelled reasonableness, fatherliness? He was her dear father: she was his beloved child: yet something divided them; something closed her father's ears to her: and could it be that incomprehensible seduction of the wine? Her dutifulness cried violently no. She bowed, stupefied, to his arguments for remaining awhile, and rose clear-headed and rebellious with the reminiscence of the many strong reasons she had urged against them.

The strangeness of men, young and old, the little things (she regarded a grand wine as a little thing) twisting and changeing them, amazed her. And these are they by whom women are abused for variability! Only the most imperious reasons, never mean trifles, move women, thought she. Would women do an injury to one they loved for oceans of that—ah! pah!

And women must respect men. They necessarily respect a father. 'My dear, dear father!' Clara said in the solitude of her chamber, musing on all his goodness, and she endeavoured to reconcile the desperate sentiments of the position he forced her to sustain, with those of a venerating daughter. The blow which

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

was to fall on him beat on her heavily in advance. 'I have not one excuse!' she said, glancing at numbers and a mighty one. But the idea of her father suffering at her hands cast her down lower than self-justification. She sought to imagine herself sparing him. It was too fictitious.

The sanctuary of her chamber, the pure white room so homely to her maidenly feelings, whispered peace, only to follow the whisper with another that went through her swelling to a roar, and leaving her as a string of music unkindly smitten. If she stayed in this house her chamber would no longer be a sanctuary. Dolorous bondage! Insolent death is not worse. Death's worm we cannot keep away, but when he has us we are numb to dishonour, happily senseless.

Youth weighed her eyelids to sleep, though she was quivering, and quivering she awoke to the sound of her name beneath her window. 'I can love still, for I love him,' she said, as she luxuriated in young Crossjay's boy's voice, again envying him his bath in the lake waters, which seemed to her to have the power to wash away grief and chains. Then it was that she resolved to let Crossjay see the last of her in this place. He should be made gleeful by doing her a piece of service; he should escort her on her walk to the railway station next morning, thence be sent flying for a long day's truancy, with a little note of apology on his behalf that she would write for him to deliver to Vernon at night.

Crossjay came running to her after his breakfast with Mrs. Montague, the housekeeper, to tell her he had called her up.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV
Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

'You won't to-morrow: I shall be up far ahead of you, said she; and musing on her father, while Crossjay vowed to be up the first, she thought it her duty to plunge into another expostulation.

Willoughby had need of Vernon on private affairs. Dr. Middleton betook himself as usual to the library, after answering: 'I will ruin you yet,' to Willoughby's liberal offer to despatch an order to London for any books he might want.

His fine unruffled air, as of a mountain in still morning beams, made Clara not indisposed to a preliminary scene with Willoughby that might save her from distressing him, but she could not stop Willoughby; as little could she look an invitation. He stood in the Hall, holding Vernon by the arm. She passed him; he did not speak, and she entered the library.

'What now, my dear? what is it?' said Dr. Middleton, seeing that the door was shut on them.

'Nothing, papa,' she replied calmly.

'You've not locked the door, my child? You turned something there: try the handle.'

'I assure you, papa, the door is not locked.'

'Mr. Whitford will be here instantly. We are engaged on tough matter. Women have not, and opinion is universal that they never will have, a conception of the value of time.'

'We are vain and shallow, my dear papa.'

'No, no, not you, Clara. But I suspect you to require to learn by having work in progress how important is . . . is a quiet commencement of the day's task. There is not a scholar who will not tell you so. We must have a retreat. These invasions!—So

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

you intend to have another ride to-day? They do you good. To-morrow we dine with Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, an estimable person indeed, though I do not perfectly understand our accepting.—You have not to accuse me of sitting over wine last night, my Clara! I never do it, unless I am appealed to for my judgement upon a wine.'

'I have come to entreat you to take me away, papa.'

In the midst of the storm aroused by this renewal of perplexity, Dr. Middleton replaced a book his elbow had knocked over in his haste to dash the hair off his forehead, crying: 'Whither? To what spot? That reading of Guide-books, and idle people's notes of Travel, and picturesque correspondence in the newspapers, unsettles man and maid. My objection to the living in hotels is known. I do not hesitate to say that I do cordially abhor it. I have had penitentially to submit to it in your dear mother's time, *καὶ τρισκακοδαίμων* up to the full ten thousand times. But will you not comprehend that to the older man his miseries are multiplied by his years! But is it utterly useless to solicit your sympathy with an old man, Clara?'

'General Darleton will take us in, papa.'

'His table is detestable. I say nothing of that; but his wine is poison. Let that pass—I should rather say, let it not pass!—but our political views are not in accord. True, we are not under the obligation to propound them in presence, but we are destitute of an opinion in common. We have no discourse. Military men *have* produced, or diverged in, noteworthy epicures: they are often devout; they have

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

blossomed in lettered men: they are gentlemen; the country rightly holds them in honour; but, in fine, I reject the proposal to go to General Darleton.—Tears?'

'No, papa.'

'I do hope not. Here we have everything man can desire; without contest, an excellent host. You have your transitory tea-cup tempests, which you magnify to hurricanes, in the approved historic manner of the book of Cupid. And all the better; I repeat, it is the better that you should have them over in the infancy of the alliance. Come in!' Dr. Middleton shouted cheerily in response to a knock at the door.

He feared the door was locked: he had a fear that his daughter intended to keep it locked.

'Clara!' he cried.

She reluctantly turned the handle, and the ladies Eleanor and Isabel came in, apologizing with as much coherence as Dr. Middleton ever expected from their sex. They wished to speak to Clara, but they declined to take her away. In vain the Rev. Doctor assured them she was at their service; they protested that they had very few words to say and would not intrude one moment further than to speak them.

Like a shy deputation of young scholars before the master, these very words to come were preceded by none at all; a dismal and trying pause; refreshing however to Dr. Middleton, who joyfully anticipated that the ladies could be induced to take away Clara when they had finished.

'We may appear to you a little formal,' Miss Isabel began, and turned to her sister.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

'We have no intention to lay undue weight on our mission, if mission it can be called,' said Miss Eleanor.

'Is it entrusted to you by Willoughby?' said Clara.

'Dear child, that you may know it all the more earnest with us, and our personal desire to contribute to your happiness: therefore does Willoughby entrust the speaking of it to us.'

Hereupon the sisters alternated in addressing Clara, and she gazed from one to the other, piecing fragments of empty signification to get the full meaning when she might.

'—And in saying, your happiness, dear Clara, we have our Willoughby's in view, which is dependent on yours.'

'—And we never could sanction that our own inclinations should stand in the way.'

'—No. We love the old place: and if it were only our punishment for loving it too idolatrously, we should deem it ground enough for our departure.'

'—Without, really, an idea of unkindness; none, not any.'

'—Young wives naturally prefer to be undisputed queens of their own establishment.'

'—Youth and age!'

'But I,' said Clara, 'have never mentioned, never had a thought . . .'

'—You have, dear child, a lover who in his solicitude for your happiness both sees what you desire and what is due to you.'

'—And for us, Clara, to recognize what is due to you is to act on it.'

'—Besides, dear, a sea-side cottage has always been one of our dreams.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

'—We have not to learn that we are a couple of old maids, incongruous associates for a young wife in the government of a great house.'

'—With our antiquated notions, questions of domestic management might arise, and with the best will in the world to be harmonious . . .!'

'—So, dear Clara, consider it settled.'

'—From time to time gladly shall we be your guests.'

'—Your guests, dear, not censorious critics.'

'And you think me such an Egoist!—dear ladies! The suggestion of so cruel a piece of selfishness wounds me. I would not have had you leave the Hall. I like your society; I respect you. My complaint, if I had one, would be, that you do not sufficiently assert yourselves. I could have wished you to be here for an example to me. I would not have allowed you to go. What can he think me!—Did Willoughby speak of it this morning?'

It was hard to distinguish which was the completer dupe of these two echoes of one another in worship of a family idol.

'Willoughby,' Miss Eleanor presented herself to be stamped with the title hanging ready for the first that should open her lips, 'our Willoughby is observant—he is ever generous—and he is not less forethoughtful. His arrangement is for our good on all sides.'

'An index is enough,' said Miss Isabel, appearing in her turn the monster dupe.

'You will not have to leave, dear ladies. Were I mistress here I should oppose it.'

'Willoughby blames himself for not reassuring you before.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV
Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

'Indeed we blame ourselves for not undertaking to go.'

'Did he speak of it first this morning?' said Clara; but she could draw no reply to that from them. They resumed the duet, and she resigned herself to have her ears boxed with nonsense.

'So, it is understood?' said Miss Eleanor.

'I see your kindness, ladies.'

'And I am to be Aunt Eleanor again?'

'And I Aunt Isabel?'

Clara could have wrung her hands at the impediment which prohibited her delicacy from telling them why she could not name them so, as she had done in the earlier days of Willoughby's courtship. She kissed them warmly, ashamed of kissing, though the warmth was real.

They retired with a flow of excuses to Dr. Middleton for disturbing him. He stood at the door to bow them out, and holding the door for Clara to wind up the procession, discovered her at a far corner of the room.

He was debating upon the advisability of leaving her there, when Vernon Whitford crossed the hall from the laboratory door, a mirror of himself in his companion air of discomposure.

That was not important, so long as Vernon was a check on Clara; but the moment Clara, thus baffled, moved to quit the library, Dr. Middleton felt the horror of having an uncomfortable face opposite.

'No botheration, I hope? It's the worst thing possible to work on. Where have you been? I suspect your weak point is not to arm yourself in triple brass against bother and worry; and no good

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

work can you do unless you do. You have come out of that laboratory.'

'I have, sir.—Can I get you any book?' Vernon said to Clara.

She thanked him, promising to depart immediately.

'Now you are at the section of Italian literature, my love,' said Dr. Middleton. 'Well, Mr. Whitford, the laboratory—ah!—where the amount of labour done within the space of a year would not stretch an electric current between this Hall and the railway station: say, four miles, which I presume the distance to be. Well, sir, a dilettantism costly in time and machinery is as ornamental as foxes' tails and deer's horns to an independent gentleman whose fellows are contented with the latter decorations for their civic wreath. Willoughby, let me remark, has recently shown himself most considerate for my girl. As far as I could gather—I have been listening to a dialogue of ladies—he is as generous as he is discreet. There are certain combats in which to be the one to succumb is to claim the honours;—and that is what women will not learn. I doubt their seeing the glory of it.'

'I have heard of it; I have been with Willoughby,' Vernon said hastily, to shield Clara from her father's allusive attacks. He wished to convey to her that his interview with Willoughby had not been profitable in her interests, and that she had better at once, having him present to support her, pour out her whole heart to her father. But how was it to be conveyed? She would not meet his eyes, and he was too poor an intriguer to be ready on the instant to deal out the verbal obscurities which are transparencies to one.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

'I shall regret it, if Willoughby has annoyed you, for he stands high in my favour,' said Dr. Middleton.

Clara dropped a book. Her father started higher than the nervous impulse warranted in his chair. Vernon tried to win a glance, and she was conscious of his effort, but her angry and guilty feelings prompting her resolution to follow her own counsel, kept her eyelids on the defensive.

'I don't say he annoys me, sir. I am here to give him my advice, and if he does not accept it I have no right to be annoyed. Willoughby seems annoyed that Colonel de Craye should talk of going to-morrow or next day.'

'He likes his friends about him. Upon my word, a man of a more genial heart you might march a day without finding. But you have it on the forehead, Mr. Whitford.'

'Oh! no, sir.'

'There,' Dr. Middleton drew his finger along his brows.

Vernon felt along his own, and coined an excuse for their blackness; unaware that the direction of his mind toward Clara pushed him to a kind of clumsy double meaning, while he satisfied an inward and craving wrath, as he said: 'By the way, I have been racking my head; I must apply to you, sir. I have a line, and I am uncertain of the run of the line. Will this pass, do you think?—

"In Asination's tongue he asinates":

signifying, that he excels any man of us at donkey-dialect.'

After a decent interval for the genius of criticism

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV Contains an Instance of the Generosity of Willoughby

to seem to have been sitting under his frown, Dr. Middleton rejoined with sober jocularity: 'No, sir, it will not pass, and your uncertainty in regard to the run of the line would only be extended were the line centipedal. Our recommendation is, that you erase it before the arrival of the ferule. This might do:—

"In Assignation's name he assignats":

signifying, that he pre-eminently flourishes hypothetical promises to pay by appointment. That might pass. But you will forbear to cite me for your authority.'

'The line would be acceptable if I could get it to apply,' said Vernon.

'Or this . . .' Dr. Middleton was offering a second suggestion, but Clara fled, astonished at men as she never yet had been. Why, in a burning world they would be exercising their minds in absurdities! And those two were scholars, learned men! And both knew they were in the presence of a soul in a tragic fever!

A minute after she had closed the door they were deep in their work. Dr. Middleton forgot his alternative line.

'Nothing serious?' he said in reproof of the want of honourable clearness on Vernon's brows.

'I trust not, sir: it 's a case for common sense.'

'And you call that not serious?'

'I take Hermann's praise of the versus dochmiachus to be not only serious but unexaggerated,' said Vernon.

Dr. Middleton assented and entered on the voiceful ground of Greek metres, shoving your dry dusty world from his elbows.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXV

The Flight in Wild Weather

The morning of Lucy Darleton's letter of reply to her friend Clara was fair before sunrise with luminous colours that are an omen to the husbandman. Clara had no weather-eye for the rich Eastern crimson, nor a quiet space within her for the beauty. She looked on it as her gate of promise, and it set her throbbing with a revived relief in radiant things which she once dreamed of to surround her life, but her accelerated pulses narrowed her thoughts upon the machinery of her project. She herself was metal, pointing all to her one aim when in motion. Nothing came amiss to it, everything was fuel; fibs, evasions, the serene battalions of white lies parallel on the march with dainty rogue falsehoods. She had delivered herself of many yesterday in her engagements for to-day. Pressure was put on her to engage herself, and she did so liberally, throwing the burden of deceitfulness on the extraordinary pressure. 'I want the early part of the morning; the rest of the day I shall be at liberty.' She said it to Willoughby, Miss Dale, Colonel de Craye, and only the third time was she aware of the delicious double meaning. Hence she associated it with the Colonel.

Your loudest outcry against the wretch who breaks your rules, is in asking how a tolerably conscientious person could have done this and the other besides the main offence, which you vow you could overlook but for the minor objections pertaining to conscience, the incomprehensible and abominable lies, for ex-

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXV
The Flight in Wild Weather

ample, or the brazen coolness of the lying. Yet you know that we live in an undisciplined world, where in our seasons of activity we are servants of our design, and that this comes of our passions, and those of our position. Our design shapes us for the work in hand, the passions man the ship, the position is their apology: and now should conscience be a passenger on board, a merely seeming swiftness of our vessel will keep him dumb as the unwilling guest of a pirate captain scudding from the cruiser half in cloven brine through rocks and shoals to save his black flag. Beware the false position.

That is easy to say: sometimes the tangle descends on us like a net of blight on a rose-bush. There is then an instant choice for us between courage to cut loose, and desperation if we do not. But not many men are trained to courage; young women are trained to cowardice. For them to front an evil with plain speech is to be guilty of effrontery and forfeit the waxen polish of purity, and therewith their commanding place in the market. They are trained to please man's taste, for which purpose they soon learn to live out of themselves, and look on themselves as he looks, almost as little disturbed as he by the undiscovered. Without courage, conscience is a sorry guest; and if all goes well with the pirate captain, conscience will be made to walk the plank for being of no service to either party.

Clara's fibs and evasions disturbed her not in the least that morning. She had chosen desperation, and she thought herself very brave because she was just brave enough to fly from her abhorrence. She was light-hearted, or more truly, drunken-hearted. Her

Digitized by Google

quick nature realized the out of prison as vividly and suddenly as it had sunk suddenly and leadenly under the sense of imprisonment. Vernon crossed her mind: that was a friend! Yes, and there was a guide; but he would disapprove, and even he thwarting her way to sacred liberty must be thrust aside.

What would he think? They might never meet, for her to know. Or one day in the Alps they might meet, a middle-aged couple, he famous, she regretful only to have fallen below his lofty standard. 'For, Mr. Whitford,' says she very earnestly, 'I did wish at that time, believe me or not, to merit your approbation.' The brows of the phantom Vernon whom she conjured up were stern, as she had seen them yesterday in the library.

She gave herself a chiding for thinking of him when her mind should be intent on that which he was opposed to.

It was a livelier relaxation to think of young Crossjay's shamefaced confession presently, that he had been a laggard in bed while she swept the dews. She laughed at him, and immediately Crossjay popped out on her from behind a tree, causing her to clap hand to heart and stand fast. A conspirator is not of the stuff to bear surprises. He feared he had hurt her and was manly in his efforts to soothe: he had been up 'hours,' he said, and had watched her coming along the avenue, and did not mean to startle her: it was the kind of fun he played with fellows, and if he had hurt her, she might do anything to him she liked, and she would see if he could not stand to be punished. He was urgent with her to inflict corporal punishment on him,

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXV
The Flight in Wild Weather

'I shall leave it to the boatswain to do that when you're in the navy,' said Clara.

'The boatswain daren't strike an officer! so now you see what you know of the navy,' said Crossjay.

'But you could not have been out before me, you naughty boy, for I found all the locks and bolts when I went to the door.'

'But you didn't go to the back-door, and Sir Willoughby's private door: you came out by the hall-door; and I know what you want, Miss Middleton, you want not to pay what you've lost.'

'What have I lost, Crossjay?'

'Your wager.'

'What was that?'

'You know.'

'Speak.'

'A kiss.'

'Nothing of the sort. But, dear boy, I don't love you less for not kissing you. All that is nonsense: you have to think only of learning, and to be truthful. Never tell a story: suffer anything rather than be dishonest.' She was particularly impressive upon the silliness and wickedness of falsehood, and added: 'Do you hear?'

'Yes: but you kissed me when I had been out in the rain that day.'

'Because I promised.'

'And Miss Middleton, you betted a kiss yesterday.'

'I am sure, Crossjay—no, I will not say I am sure: but can you say you are sure you were out first this morning? Well, will you say you are sure that when you left the house you did not see me in the avenue? You can't: ah!'

Digitized by Google

'Miss Middleton, I do really believe I was dressed first.'

'Always be truthful, my dear boy, and then you may feel that Clara Middleton will always love you.'

'But Miss Middleton, when you're married you won't be Clara Middleton.'

'I certainly shall, Crossjay.'

'No, you won't, because I'm so fond of your name!'

She considered and said: 'You have warned me, Crossjay, and I shall not marry. I shall wait,' she was going to say, 'for you,' but turned the hesitation to a period. 'Is the village where I posted my letter the day before yesterday too far for you?'

Crossjay howled in contempt. 'Next to Clara my favourite 's Lucy,' he said.

'I thought Clara came next to Nelson,' said she; 'and a long way off too, if you're not going to be a landlubber.'

'I'm not going to be a landlubber, Miss Middleton, you may be absolutely positive on your solemn word.'

'You're getting to talk like one a little now and then, Crossjay.'

'Then I won't talk at all.'

He stuck to his resolution for one whole minute.

Clara hoped that on this morning of a doubtful though imperative venture she had done some good.

They walked fast to cover the distance to the village post-office and back before the breakfast hour: and they had plenty of time, arriving too early for the opening of the door, so that Crossjay began to dance with an appetite, and was despatched to besiege a bakery. Clara felt lonely without him, apprehensively

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXV
The Flight in Wild Weather

timid in the shuttered unmoving village street. She was glad of his return. When at last her letter was handed to her, on the testimony of the postman that she was the lawful applicant, Crossjay and she put on a sharp trot to be back at the Hall in good time. She took a swallowing glance of the first page of Lucy's writing:

'Telegraph, and I will meet you. I will supply you with everything you can want for the two nights, if you cannot stop longer.'

That was the gist of the letter. A second, less voracious, glance at it along the road brought sweetness:—Lucy wrote:

'Do I love you as I did? my best friend, you must fall into unhappiness to have the answer to that.'

Clara broke a silence.

'Yes, dear Crossjay, and if you like you shall have another walk with me after breakfast. But remember, you must not say where you have gone with me. I shall give you twenty shillings to go and buy those birds' eggs and the butterflies you want for your collection; and mind, promise me, to-day is your last day of truancy. Tell Mr. Whitford how ungrateful you know you have been, that he may have some hope of you. You know the way across the fields to the railway station?'

'You save a mile; you drop on the road by Combline's mill, and then there's another five minutes' cut, and the rest's road.'

'Then, Crossjay, immediately after breakfast run round behind the pheasantry, and there I'll find you. And if any one comes to you before I come, say you are admiring the plumage of the Himalaya—

Digitized by Google

the beautiful Indian bird; and if we 're found together, we run a race, and of course you can catch me, but you mustn't until we're out of sight. Tell Mr. Vernon at night—tell Mr. Whitford at night you had the money from me as part of my allowance to you for pocket-money. I used to like to have pocket-money, Crossjay. And you may tell him I gave you the holiday, and I may write to him for his excuse, if he is not too harsh to grant it. He can be very harsh.'

'You look right into his eyes next time, Miss Middleton. I used to think him awful, till he made me look at him. He says men ought to look straight at one another, just as we do when he gives me my boxing-lesson, and then we won't have quarrelling half so much. I can't recollect everything he says.'

'You are not bound to, Crossjay.'

'No, but you like to hear.'

'Really, dear boy, I can't accuse myself of having told you that.'

'No, but, Miss Middleton, you do. And he 's fond of your singing and playing on the piano, and watches you.'

'We shall be late if we don't mind,' said Clara, starting to a pace close on a run.

They were in time for a circuit in the park to the wild double cherry-blossom, no longer all white. Clara gazed up from under it, where she had imagined a fairer visible heavenliness than any other sight of earth had ever given her. That was when Vernon lay beneath. But she had certainly looked above, not at him. The tree seemed sorrowful in its withering flowers of the colour of trodden snow.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXV
The Flight in Wild Weather

Crossjay resumed the conversation.

'He says ladies don't like him much.'

'Who says that?'

'Mr. Whitford.'

'Were those his words?'

'I forget the words: but he said they wouldn't be taught by him, like me ever since you came; and since you came I've liked him ten times more.'

'The more you like him the more I shall like you, Crossjay.'

The boy raised a shout and scampered away to Sir Willoughby, at the appearance of whom Clara felt herself nipped and curling inward. Crossjay ran up to him with every sign of pleasure. Yet he had not mentioned him during the walk; and Clara took it for a sign that the boy understood the entire satisfaction Willoughby had in mere shows of affection, and acted up to it. Hardly blaming Crossjay, she was a critic of the scene, for the reason that youthful creatures who have ceased to love a person, hunger for evidence against him to confirm their hard animus, which will seem to them sometimes, when he is not immediately irritating them, brutish, because they cannot analyze it and reduce it to the multitude of just antagonisms whereof it came. It has passed by large accumulation into a sombre and speechless load upon the senses, and fresh evidence, the smallest item, is a champion to speak for it. Being about to do wrong, she grasped at this eagerly, and brooded on the little of vital and truthful that there was in the man, and how he corrupted the boy. Nevertheless she instinctively imitated Crossjay in an almost sparkling salute to him.

Digitized by Google

'Good morning, Willoughby; it was not a morning to lose: have you been out long?'

He retained her hand. 'My dear Clara! and you, have you not over-fatigued yourself? Where have you been?'

'Round—everywhere! And I am certainly not tired.'

'Only you and Crossjay? You should have loosened the dogs.'

'Their barking would have annoyed the house.'

'Less than I am annoyed to think of you without protection.'

He kissed her fingers: it was a loving speech.

'The household . . .' said Clara, but would not insist to convict him of what he could not have perceived.

'If you outstrip me another morning, Clara, promise me to take the dogs; will you?'

'Yes.'

'To-day I am altogether yours.'

'Are you?'

'From the first to the last hour of it!—So you fall in with Horace's humour pleasantly?'

'He is very amusing.'

'As good as though one had hired him.'

'Here comes Colonel de Craye.'

'He must think we *have* hired him!'

She noticed the bitterness of Willoughby's tone. He sang out a good morning to De Craye, and remarked that he must go to the stables.

'Darleton? Darleton, Miss Middleton?' said the colonel, rising from his bow to her: 'A daughter of General Darleton? If so, I have had the honour to dance with her. And have not you?—practised with her, I mean; or gone off in a triumph to dance it out

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXV
The Flight in Wild Weather

as young ladies do. So you know what a delightful partner she is.'

'She is!' cried Clara, enthusiastic for her succouring friend, whose letter was the treasure in her bosom.

'Oddly, the name did not strike me yesterday, Miss Middleton. In the middle of the night it rang a little silver bell in my ear, and I remembered the lady I was half in love with, if only for her dancing. She is dark, of your height, as light on her feet; a sister in another colour. Now that I know her to be your friend . . .!'

'Why, you may meet her, Colonel de Craye.'

'It'll be to offer her a castaway. And one only meets a charming girl to hear that she's engaged! 'Tis not a line of a ballad, Miss Middleton, but out of the heart.'

'Lucy Darleton . . . You were leading me to talk seriously to you, Colonel de Craye.'

'Will you one day?—and not think me a perpetual tumbler! You have heard of melancholy clowns. You would find the face not so laughable behind my paint. When I was thirteen years younger I was loved, and my dearest sank to the grave. Since then I have not been quite at home in life; probably because of finding no one so charitable as she. 'Tis easy to win smiles and hands, but not so easy to win a woman whose faith you would trust as your own heart before the enemy. I was poor then. She said: "The day after my twenty-first birthday"; and that day I went for her, and I wondered they did not refuse me at the door. I was shown upstairs, and I saw her, and saw death. She wished to marry me, to leave me her fortune!'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXV
The Flight in Wild Weather

'Then never marry,' said Clara in an underbreath.

She glanced behind.

Sir Willoughby was close, walking on turf.

'I must be cunning to escape him after breakfast,' she thought.

He had discarded his foolishness of the previous days, and the thought in him could have replied: 'I am a dolt if I let you out of my sight.'

Vernon appeared, formal as usual of late. Clara begged his excuse for withdrawing Crossjay from his morning swim. He nodded.

De Craye called to Willoughby for a book of the trains.

'There's a card in the smoking-room; eleven, one, and four are the hours, if you must go,' said Willoughby.

'You leave the Hall, Colonel de Craye?'

'In two or three days, Miss Middleton.'

She did not request him to stay: his announcement produced no effect on her. Consequently, thought he —well, what? nothing: well, then, that she might not be minded to stay herself. Otherwise she would have regretted the loss of an amusing companion: that is the modest way of putting it. There is a modest and a vain for the same sentiment; and both may be simultaneously in the same breast; and each one as honest as the other; so shy is man's vanity in the presence of here and there a lady. She liked him: she did not care a pin for him—how could she? yet she liked him: O to be able to do her some kindling bit of service! These were his consecutive fancies, resolving naturally to the exclamation, and built on the conviction that she did not love Willoughby, and waited for a

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXV
The Flight in Wild Weather

spirited lift from circumstances. His call for a book of the trains had been a sheer piece of impromptu, in the mind as well as on the mouth. It sprang, unknown to him, of conjectures he had indulged yesterday and the day before. This morning she would have an answer to her letter to her friend, Miss Lucy Darleton, the pretty dark girl, whom De Craye was astonished not to have noticed more when he danced with her. She, pretty as she was, had come to his recollection through the name and rank of her father, a famous general of cavalry, and tactician in that arm. The colonel despised himself for not having been devoted to Clara Middleton's friend.

The morning's letters were on the bronze plate in the hall. Clara passed on her way to her room without inspecting them. De Craye opened an envelope and went upstairs to scribble a line. Sir Willoughby observed their absence at the solemn reading to the domestic servants in advance of breakfast. Three chairs were unoccupied. Vernon had his own notions of a mechanical service—and a precious profit he derived from them! but the other two seats returned the stare Willoughby cast at their backs with an impudence that reminded him of his friend Horace's calling for a book of the trains, when a minute afterward he admitted he was going to stay at the Hall another two days, or three. The man possessed by jealousy is never in need of matter for it: he magnifies; grass is jungle, hillocks are mountains. Willoughby's legs crossing and uncrossing audibly, and his tight-folded arms and clearing of the throat, were faint indications of his condition.

'Are you in fair health this morning, Willoughby?'

Digitized by Google

Dr. Middleton said to him after he had closed his volumes.

'The thing is not much questioned by those who know me intimately,' he replied.

'Willoughby unwell!' and: 'He is health incarnate!' exclaimed the ladies Eleanor and Isabel.

Lætitia grieved for him. Sunrays on a pest-stricken city, she thought, were like the smile of his face. She believed that he deeply loved Clara and had learnt more of her alienation.

He went into the hall to look up the well for the pair of malefactors; on fire with what he could not reveal to a soul.

De Craye was in the housekeeper's room, talking to young Crossjay and Mrs. Montague just come up to breakfast. He had heard the boy chattering, and as the door was ajar, he peeped in, and was invited to enter. Mrs. Montague was very fond of hearing him talk; he paid her the familiar respect which a lady of fallen fortunes, at a certain period after the fall, enjoys as a befittingly sad souvenir, and the respectfulness of the lord of the house was more chilling.

She bewailed the boy's trying his constitution with long walks before he had anything in him to walk on.

'And where did you go this morning, my lad?' said De Craye.

'Ah, you know the ground, colonel,' said Crossjay. 'I am hungry! I shall eat three eggs and some bacon, and buttered cakes, and jam, then begin again, on my second cup of coffee.'

'It's not braggadocio,' remarked Mrs. Montague. 'He waits empty from five in the morning till nine, and then he comes famished to my table, and eats too much.'

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXV
The Flight in Wild Weather

'Oh! Mrs. Montague, that is what the country people call roemancing. For, Colonel de Craye, I had a bun at seven o'clock. Miss Middleton forced me to go and buy it.'

'A stale bun, my boy?'

'Yesterday's: there wasn't much of a stopper to you in it, like a new bun.'

'And where did you leave Miss Middleton when you went to buy the bun? You should never leave a lady; and the street of a country town is lonely at that early hour. Crossjay, you surprise me.'

'She forced me to go, colonel. Indeed she did. What do I care for a bun! And she was quite safe. We could hear the people stirring in the post-office, and I met our postman going for his letter-bag. I didn't want to go: bother the bun!—but you can't disobey Miss Middleton. I never want to, and wouldn't.'

'There we 're of the same mind,' said the colonel, and Crossjay shouted, for the lady whom they exalted was at the door.

'You will be too tired for a ride this morning,' De Craye said to her, descending the stairs.

She swung a bonnet by the ribands: 'I don't think of riding to-day.'

'Why did you not depute your mission to me?'

'I like to bear my own burdens, as far as I can.'

'Miss Darleton is well?'

'I presume so.'

'Will you try her recollection of me?'

'It will probably be quite as lively as yours was.'

'Shall you see her soon?'

'I hope so.'

Digitized by Google

Sir Willoughby met her at the foot of the stairs, but refrained from giving her a hand that shook.

'We shall have the day together,' he said.

Clara bowed.

At the breakfast table she faced a clock.

De Craye took out his watch. 'You are five and a half minutes too slow by that clock, Willoughby.'

'The man omitted to come from Rendon to set it last week, Horace. He will find the hour too late here for him when he does come.'

One of the ladies compared the time of her watch with De Craye's, and Clara looked at hers and gratefully noted that she was four minutes in arrear.

She left the breakfast-room at a quarter to ten, after kissing her father. Willoughby was behind her. He had been soothed by thinking of his personal advantages over De Craye, and he felt assured that if he could be solitary with his eccentric bride and fold her in himself, he would, cutting temper adrift, be the man he had been to her not so many days back. Considering how few days back, his temper was roused, but he controlled it.

They were slightly dissenting as De Craye stepped into the hall.

'A present worth examining,' Willoughby said to her: 'and I do not dwell on the costliness. Come presently, then. I am at your disposai all day. I will drive you in the afternoon to call on Lady Busshe to offer your thanks: but you must see it first. It is laid out in the laboratory.'

'There is time before the afternoon,' said Clara.

'Wedding presents?' interposed De Craye.

'A porcelain service from Lady Busshe, Horace.'

'Not in fragments? Let me have a look at it. I'm

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXV
The Flight in Wild Weather

haunted by an idea that porcelain always goes to pieces. I'll have a look and take a hint. We're in the laboratory, Miss Middleton.'

He put his arm under Willoughby's. The resistance to him was momentary: Willoughby had the satisfaction of the thought that De Craye being with him was not with Clara; and seeing her giving orders to her maid Barclay, he deferred his claim on her company for some short period.

De Craye detained him in the laboratory, first over the China cups and saucers, and then with the latest of London—tales of youngest Cupid upon subterranean adventures, having high titles to light him. Willoughby liked the tale thus illuminated, for without the title there was no special savour in such affairs, and it pulled down his betters in rank. He was of a morality to reprobate the erring dame while he enjoyed the incidents. He could not help interrupting De Craye to point at Vernon through the window, striding this way and that, evidently on the hunt for young Crossjay. 'No one here knows how to manage the boy except myself. But go on, Horace,' he said, checking his contemptuous laugh; and Vernon did look ridiculous, out there half-drenched already in a white rain, again shuffled off by the little rascal. It seemed that he was determined to have his runaway: he struck up the avenue at full pedestrian racing pace.

'A man looks a fool cutting after a cricket-ball; but putting on steam in a storm of rain to catch a young villain out of sight, beats anything I've witnessed,' Willoughby resumed, in his amusement.

'Aiha!' said De Craye, waving a hand to accompany

Digitized by Google

the melodious accent, 'there are things to beat that for fun.'

He had smoked in the laboratory, so Willoughby directed a servant to transfer the porcelain service to one of the sitting-rooms for Clara's inspection of it.

'You're a bold man,' De Craye remarked. 'The luck may be with you, though. I wouldn't handle the fragile treasure for a trifle.'

'I believe in my luck,' said Willoughby.

Clara was now sought for. The lord of the house desired her presence impatiently, and had to wait. She was in none of the lower rooms. Barclay, her maid, upon interrogation, declared she was in none of the upper. Willoughby turned sharp on De Craye: he was there.

The ladies Eleanor and Isabel, and Miss Dale, were consulted. They had nothing to say about Clara's movements, more than that they could not understand her exceeding restlessness. The idea of her being out of doors grew serious; heaven was black, hard thunder rolled, and lightning flushed the battering rain. Men bearing umbrellas, shawls and cloaks were despatched on a circuit of the park. De Craye said: 'I'll be one.'

'No,' cried Willoughby, starting to intercept him, 'I can't allow it.'

'I've the scent of a hound, Willoughby; I'll soon be on the track.'

'My dear Horace, I won't let you go.'

'Adieu, dear boy! and if the lady's discoverable, I'm the one to find her.'

He stepped to the umbrella-stand. There was then a general question whether Clara had taken her

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXV
The Flight in Wild Weather

umbrella. Barclay said she had. The fact indicated a wider stroll than round inside the park: Crossjay was likewise absent. De Craye nodded to himself.

Willoughby struck a rattling blow on the barometer.

'Where's Pollington?' he called, and sent word for his man Pollington to bring big fishing-boots and waterproof wrappers.

An urgent debate within him was in progress.

Should he go forth alone on his chance of discovering Clara and forgiving her under his umbrella and cloak? or should he prevent De Craye from going forth alone on the chance he vaunted so impudently?

'You will offend me, Horace, if you insist,' he said.

'Regard me as an instrument of destiny, Willoughby,' replied De Craye.

'Then we go in company.'

'But that's an addition of one that cancels the other by conjunction, and 's worse than simple division: for I can't trust my wits unless I rely on them alone, you see.'

'Upon my word, you talk at times most unintelligible stuff, to be frank with you, Horace. Give it in English.'

''Tis not suited perhaps to the genius of the language, for I thought I talked English.'

'Oh! there's English gibberish as well as Irish, we know!'

'And a deal foolisher when they do go at it; for it won't bear squeezing, we think, like Irish.'

'Where!' exclaimed the ladies, 'where can she be! The storm is terrible.'

Lætitia suggested the boathouse.

'For Crossjay hadn't a swim this morning!' said De Craye.

Digitized by Google

No one reflected on the absurdity that Clara should think of taking Crossjay for a swim in the lake, and immediately after his breakfast: it was accepted as a suggestion at least that she and Crossjay had gone to the lake for a row.

In the hopefulness of the idea, Willoughby suffered De Craye to go on his chance unaccompanied. He was near chuckling. He projected a plan for dismissing Crossjay and remaining in the boathouse with Clara, luxuriating in the prestige which would attach to him for seeking and finding her. Deadly sentiments intervened. Still he might expect to be alone with her where she could not slip from him.

The throwing open of the hall-doors for the gentlemen presented a framed picture of a deluge. All the young-leaved trees were steely black, without a gradation of green, drooping and pouring, and the song of rain had become an inveterate hiss.

The ladies beholding it exclaimed against Clara, even apostrophized her, so dark are trivial errors when circumstances frown. She must be mad to tempt such weather: she was very giddy; she was never at rest. Clara! Clara! how could you be so wild! Ought we not to tell Dr. Middleton?

Lætitia induced them to spare him.

'Which way do you take?' said Willoughby, rather fearful that his companion was not to be got rid of now.

'Any way,' said De Craye. 'I chuck up my head like a halfpenny and go by the toss.'

This enraging nonsense drove off Willoughby. De Craye saw him cast a furtive eye at his heels to make sure he was not followed, and thought: 'Jove! he

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXV
The Flight in Wild Weather

may be fond of her. But he's not on the track. She's a determined girl, if I'm correct. She's a girl of a hundred thousand. Girls like that make the right sort of wives for the right men. They're the girls to make men think of marrying. To-morrow! only give me the chance. They stick to you fast when they do stick.'

Then a thought of her flower-like drapery and face caused him fervently to hope she had escaped the storm.

Calling at the West park-lodge he heard that Miss Middleton had been seen passing through the gate with Master Crossjay; but she had not been seen coming back. Mr. Vernon Whitford had passed through half an hour later.

'After his young man!' said the colonel.

The lodge-keeper's wife and daughter knew of Master Crossjay's pranks; Mr. Whitford, they said, had made inquiries about him, and must have caught him and sent him home to change his dripping things; for Master Crossjay had come back, and had declined shelter in the lodge; he seemed to be crying; he went away soaking over the wet grass, hanging his head. The opinion at the lodge was, that Master Crossjay was unhappy.

'He very properly received a wigging from Mr. Whitford, I have no doubt,' said Colonel de Craye.

Mother and daughter supposed it to be the case, and considered Crossjay very wilful for not going straight home to the Hall to change his wet clothes; he was drenched.

De Craye drew out his watch. The time was ten minutes past eleven. If the surmise he had distantly

Digitized by Google

spied was correct, Miss Middleton would have been caught in the storm midway to her destination. By his guess at her character (knowledge of it, he would have said), he judged that no storm would daunt her on a predetermined expedition. He deduced in consequence that she was at the present moment flying to her friend the charming brunette Lucy Darleton.

Still, as there was a possibility of the rain having been too much for her, and as he had no other speculation concerning the route she had taken, he decided upon keeping along the road to Rendon, with a keen eye at cottage and farmhouse windows.

EDINBURGH: T. and A. CONSTABLE, Printers to Her Majesty

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

HW 2S2C S

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google